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AIRY NOTHINGS

OR WHAT YOU WILL

BY

GEORGE GORDON

presented
Baldwin, Charles Cuttenton

New York
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MCW Je 17 '15.

TO

MISS KATHERINE MACDONALD

In memory of many pleasant evenings spent
at the theatre, and in especial of the
night we witnessed Mr. Granville
Barker's production of "A
Midsummer Night's
Dream"

An antique fable, and thereto a preface on morals, such as Theseus, reputed sometime Duke of Athens, vowed he never could believe. And with good reason: poets, lovers and madmen have such seething brains, bodying forth the form of things unknown, giving to airy nothing a local habitation and a name. And yet, what's in a name? The first recorded William Shakespeare was hanged for robbery in 1248; the latest Cleopatra dances in burlesque. Mary Fitton or Mistress Davenant — what odds the name? A poet loved a woman and wooed her frailty into immortal rhyme. You are content to read his verses; then why not I? Why must I see all Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt? Because I know there is a world of romance in a name; and when you whisper "Guenevere" to me, my soul harks back to Arthur's court, mine eyes look on the queen, and in a dream I seem to see her walking 'mid the flowers of Camelot; I see her pause and raise her head as on the gravel-walk she hears the tread of Lancelot's mailed feet. And Mary? 'Tis the name of the Mother of God.

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AIRY NOTHINGS,

OR WHAT YOU WILL

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Even a long human life is so brief and fugitive that it seems little short of a miracle that it can leave traces behind which endure through centuries. The millions die and sink into oblivion and their deeds die with them. A few thousands so far conquer death as to leave their names to be a burden to the memories of school children, but convey little else to posterity. But some few master-minds remain, and among them Shakespeare ranks with Leonardo and Michael Angelo. He was hardly laid in his grave than he rose from it again. Of all the great names of this earth, none is more certain of immortality than that of Shakespeare. . . . And he is not thirty-six plays and a few poems jumbled together and read pêle-mêle, but a man who felt and thought, rejoiced and suffered, brooded, dreamed, and created. Far too long has it been the custom to say, ' We

know nothing about Shakespeare'; or, 'An octavo page would contain all our knowledge of him.' Even Swinburne has written of the intangibility of his personality in his works. Such assertions have been carried so far that a wretched group of dilettanti has been bold enough, in Europe and America, to deny William Shakespeare the right to his own life-work, to give to another the honor due to his genius, and to bespatter him and his invulnerable name with an insane abuse which has re-echoed through every land. . . .

It is the author's opinion that, given the possession of forty-five important works by any man, it is entirely our fault if we know nothing whatever about him. The poet has incorporated his whole individuality in these writings, and there, if we can read aright, we shall find him.

The William Shakespeare who was born in Stratford-on-Avon in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, who lived and wrote in London in her reign and that of James, who ascended into heaven in his comedies and descended into hell in his tragedies, and died at the age of fifty-two in his native town, rises a wonderful personality in grand and distinct outlines, with all the vivid colouring of life, from the pages of his books before the eyes of all who read them with an

open, receptive mind, with sanity of judgment and simple susceptibility to the power of genius.

—GEORG BRANDES: William Shakespeare, A Critical Study.

PONS ASINORUM

"Pope was not a poet in the true sense,"—I quote from Mr. Arthur Symons' The Romantic Movement in English Literature—"a born poet who had the misfortune to be modified by the influence of the age into which he was born, but a writer of extraordinary prose capacity and finish, who, if he had lived in another age and among genuine poets, would have had no more than a place apart, admired for the unique thing which he could do, but not mistaken for a poet of true lineage. Pope's poetic sensibility may be gauged by a single emendation which he made in the text of his edition of Shakespeare. Shakespeare had made Antony say to Cleopatra, 'O grave charm.' To Pope it seemed ridiculous that a light woman should possess gravity in charm. He proposed 'gay,' and nature seemed to be reasserted: 'O gay charm!' what more probable and sufficient?"

I

Nor was Pope alone in believing himself capable of improving upon Shakespeare's text.

Take the fantastic interlude of the drunken porter in Macbeth, Act II, 3. It follows immediately upon the masterly scene between Macbeth and his wife wherein he tells her that he has murdered Duncan, and she upbraids him for not having smeared the grooms with blood that it might seem their guilt. They leave the stage. There is a knocking within, and the porter enters, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. He has been carousing with the king's men, and, the worse for wine, believes himself to be keeping watch at hell-gate, admitting first a farmer that had hanged himself, then an equivocating Jesuit, and finally an English tailor. 'But this place is too cold to be hell;' and so saying, he comes broad awake. The knocking continues. He opens the gate; and Macduff enters, accompanied by Lennox. There follows a dialogue between Macduff and the porter on the influence of drink upon erotic inclination and capacity. Now the Elizabethan was a curtainless stage. A short break in the action of the tragedy was required at this point to give Macbeth time to change into his night-clothes, wash the blood from his hands, and reappear with the air of one called up from bed. What could have been more effective than this scene which thrills Macbeth and his wife with terror? Who could be abroad at this hour in the morn-

ing? Have they been discovered? While it may not rank with the best of Shakespeare's low comedy interludes, it affords a striking contrast to what goes before and to what follows; it is a lull in the storm that is sweeping Macbeth on to his doom; it affords the spectators some relief. And yet, as is well known, Schiller, in accordance with classical prejudices, omitted the soliloquy from his translation, replacing it by a pious morning song. But what seems even more remarkable, Coleridge, a presumably competent critic, considered the passage spurious — save for one phrase too Shakespearean to reject, ' the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire '— and its effect disturbing.

There is a world of difference between the tone of such corrections and the changes made by Shakespeare in the old plays which he retouched for my Lord Chamberlain's company of players. What an improvement he makes, sometimes by a mere rearrangement of the words, as when Gloucester says of his wife. Henry VI, Part II, Act II, 4: —

> Uneath may she endure the flinty streets
> To tread them with her tender-feeling feet.

His sympathy for her echoes between the lines; yet in the original text it was she who spoke those words. Most Shakespearean too is the

manner in which York's two sons are made to draw their own characters, each in a single line, when they receive news of their father's death, Henry VI, Part III, Act II, 1: —

EDWARD: O, speak no more! for I have heard too much.
RICHARD: Say how he died, for I will hear it all.

There is a line in King Lear, Act IV, 7, that has a history, and shows how well Shakespeare understood what to preserve and use, what to discard, in the work of his predecessors. The old king is borne sleeping onto the stage. The doctor orders music to sound, and Cordelia says: —

O my dear father! Restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips; and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made!
KENT: Kind and dear princess!
COR.: Had you not been their father, these white flakes
Had challenged pity of them. Was this a face
To be opposed against the warring winds?
To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder?

Lear stirs and wakes; Cordelia asks: —

How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

LEAR: You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave:
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.

Then he comes to himself, asks where he has been, and where he is; is surprised to find the day so fair; remembers what he has suffered: —

COR.: O, look upon me, sir,
And hold your hands in benediction o'er me:
No, sir, you must not kneel.

Notice this last line. In the old drama, dating from 1593–4, and entitled The Chronicle History of King Leir, this kneeling was a prominent feature. There the king and Perillus, (Kent), wandering about, almost perished, without food, without shelter, fall in with Cordelia and her husband, the King of Gaul; the daughter recognises her father, and gives him to eat and drink. When he is satisfied, he recounts to her the trials and adventures through which he and his faithful friend have passed. Then: —

LEIR: O no men's children are unkind but mine.
CORDELIA: Condemne not all, because of others' crime,
But looke, deare father, look, behold and see
Thy loving daughter speaketh unto thee.
(*She kneeles*).

LEIR: O, stand thou up, it is my part to kneele,
And ask forgiveness for my former faults
(*He kneeles*).

The scene is doubtless beautiful, but would be impossible upon the stage where two persons kneeling to each other (as actually occurs in some of Molière's comedies) cannot but produce a comic effect. Shakespeare understood this; he was intimately acquainted with his audience, profoundly and practically versed in stagecraft; he knew how to utilise to the best advantage the good in another man's work. And yet, as Lowell has said, "scarce a commentator of them all, for more than a hundred years, but thought, as Alphonso of Castile did of Creation, that, if he had only been at Shakespeare's elbow, he could have given valuable advice; scarce one who did not know off-hand that there was never a seaport in Bohemia — as if Shakespeare's world were one which Mercator could have projected; scarce one but was satisfied that his ten finger-tips were a sufficient key to those astronomic wonders of poise and counterpoise, of planetary law and cometary seeming-exception, in his metres; scarce one but thought he could gauge like an ale-firkin that intuition whose edging shallows may have been sounded, but whose abysses, stretching down amid the sunless roots of Being and Conscious-

ness, mock the plummet; scarce one but could speak with condescending approval of that prodigious intelligence so utterly without congener that our baffled language must coin an adjective to qualify it, and none is so audacious as to say Shakespearean of any other."

James Russell Lowell, however, underestimated our audacity. Only yesterday Professor Henderson spoke of Strindberg as a dramatist truly Shakespearean in range, power and intensity of feeling. Myself I consider Synge to have been almost Shakespearean in his capacity for sympathy and in the haunting beauty of his prose. There are two lines in Poe's Annabel Lee: —

> With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
> Coveted her and me

Compare with this a somewhat similar passage in The Playboy of the Western World: —

PEGEEN: [*looking at him playfully*]. And it's that kind of a poacher's love you'd make, Christy Mahon, on the sides of Neifin, when the night is down?

CHRISTY: It's little you'll think if my love is a poacher's, or an earl's itself, when you'll feel my two hands stretched around you, and I squeezing kisses on your puckered lips, till I'd feel a kind of pity for the Lord God is all ages sitting lonesome in his golden chair.

II

Professor George Lyman Kittredge, in a lecture on Shakespeare delivered at Harvard University, April 23, 1916, refers to Dr. Johnson as "one of the most sensible and serviceable in that long array of professed Shakespeareans"— and we are all of us, more or less, professed Shakespeareans —"that bids fair to stretch out to the crack of doom;" quotes the learned doctor to the effect that "men, in general, do not need so much to be informed as to be reminded;" and thanks his honoured ghost for that reminder. And I thank the professor. There is nothing new beneath the sun; all that I shall say, men have heard before; all that you will find here written in my book, I have come by honestly — I have stolen from the books of others, as the professor stole from Boswell. For who is Dr. Johnson? For us a creation of Boswell's. And so it is to Boswell that I would direct your attention. He is by no means the least of the professed Shakespeareans; he is too often slighted by those who feign to love fine writing, too often ignored by a world that quotes him every day. Nor do I consider it blasphemy to mention him in the same breath with Shakespeare. There is a

strange analogy between the two: each is supreme in his own chosen field. Shakespeare dramatised the lives of many men and women — Richard the Third, Viola, Lear, Hamlet, Macbeth and Portia, Mercutio, and a vast company of their peers; for us they exist only as he has told about them. And so with Dr. Johnson. Not in the absurdly dignified and laboured sentences that flowed in awesome periods from his pen, but in the shrewd and brilliant talk that fell like manna from his lips to be gathered by his friend and so fed to the multitude, is contained the whole man and his romance, his amour with life, his coquetting with death. Shakespeare writing to William Herbert — for my part, I am convinced that he was the Mr. W. H. of the Dedication — said, Sonnet XVII: —

> Who will believe my verse in time to come,
> If it were fill'd with your most high deserts?
>
>
>
> But were some child of yours alive that time,
> You should live twice — in it and in my rhyme.

And again, Sonnet XIX: —

> Yet, do thy worst, old Time; despite thy wrong,
> My love shall in my verse ever live young.

As Mr. Shaw remarks, 'Shakespeare immortalised Mr. W. H., as he said he would, simply

by writing about him.' Boswell seems to have had some such idea in mind regarding Johnson. And he was, as Henley has pointed out, fully alive to the enduring merits of his achievement: "I will venture to say," he wrote, "that he (Johnson) will be seen in this work more completely than any man that has ever lived."

Nor is this all. They have been blamed and praised *de profundis in excelsis*. Shakespeare is patronised by Broadway; Macaulay explicitly declares that Boswell wrote one of the most charming of books because he was one of the greatest of fools. They have been idolised perhaps; but they have suffered above the average at the hands of posterity, from the ignorance of their editors and the stupidity of readers the world over. A plague on all cowards!

III

'Délassons-nous un peu à parler de M. de Pontmartin,' says Sainte-Beuve, at the outset of a causerie. Not that there is any connection (to paraphrase Mr. Austin Dobson) between M. de Pontmartin and Boswell of whom I shall speak; nor — let me hasten to add — between myself and 'the keenest and finest of French literary critics.' But that Boswell has been for

years the cheerful companion of many an hour's relaxation; and I, for one, never tire of referring to him. Mr. Augustine Birrell, the most charming of Johnsonians — I am everlastingly indebted to him for that essay on Falstaff — insists that when he is finally 'kicked out of office,' he will retire into the country and really read Boswell. An enviable ambition! What is most distinctive in Boswell is Boswell's method and Boswell's manner; yet from the very outset, it would seem, he was considerably 'edited.' We must forget his editors if we would 'really read Boswell.' Long ago Johnson, referring to the Corsican tour, had touched upon the personal quality in his writings.

"Your History," he said, "is like other histories, but your Journal is in a very high degree curious and delightful . . . Your History was copied from books; your Journal rose out of your own experience and observation. You express images which operated strongly upon yourself, and you have impressed them with great force upon your readers." From less friendly critics the verdict was the same. Mr. Austin Dobson has a very interesting note on the subject. His essay, Boswell's Predecessors and Editors is well worth reading. "Gray, who has been 'pleased and moved strangely,' declares it proves what he has al-

ways maintained, 'that any fool may write a most valuable book by chance, if he will only tell us what he heard and saw with veracity.' This faculty of communicating his impressions accurately to his reader is Boswell's most conspicuous gift. Present in his first book, it was more present in his second, and when he began his great biography it had reached its highest point. So individual is his manner, so unique his method of collecting and arranging his information, that to disturb the native character of his narrative by interpolating foreign material, must of necessity impair its specific character and imperil its personal note. Yet, by some strange freak of fate, this was just the very treatment to which it was subjected." It seems that "Boswell, like many writers of his temperament, was fond of stimulating his flagging invention by miscellaneous advice, and it is plain from the comparison of his finished work with his rough notes, that in order to make his anecdotes more direct and effective he freely manipulated his reminiscences"; much as Shakespeare manipulated Plutarch, Holinshed and the old plays he rewrote. "But it is quite probable — and this is a point that we do not remember to have seen touched on — that much of the trimming which his records received is attributable to Malone. At all events, when

Malone took up the editing after Boswell's death, he is known to have made many minor alterations in the process of 'settling the text,' and it is only reasonable to suppose that he had done the same thing in the author's lifetime, a supposition which would account for some at least of the variations which have been observed between Boswell's anecdotes in their earliest and their latest forms. But the admitted alterations of Malone were but trifles compared with the extraordinary readjustment which the book, as Malone left it, received at the hands of Mr. Croker." Nor was Croker the only offender; their name is legion — Macaulay, Carlyle, Lockhart, (writing to Murray, the publisher, Jan. 19, 1829, he said, 'Pray ask Croker whether Boswell's account of the Hebridean Tour ought not to be melted into the book,' very much as Sir Herbert Tree 'melted' Falstaff via the clothes-basket out of Henry IV into the Merry Wives of Windsor), Carruthers, Fitzgerald and who not. His days of sorrowing are probably not yet ended, despite Henley's spirited appeal that he be given without further parley that high place among the great artists of all time that is his by every claim of genius. The Baconians assail the imperturbable figure of Shakespeare much as England once jeered at Napoleon and the French

or we at England; why should Boswell be permitted to go scot-free? The heroes of antiquity, erect above the hurrying crowds, present a target for posterity that wakes the urchin in us; we cannot pass them by without hurling an occasional stone. An occasional stone!

I own to a very genuine affection for Mr. Bernard Shaw; I cannot, however, always find it in my heart to forgive him the madness of his pranks. "It was in As You Like It that the sententious William first began to openly exploit the fondness of the British Public for sham moralizing and stage philosophizing. It contains one passage that specially exasperates me. Jacques, who spends his time, like Hamlet, in vainly emulating the wisdom of Sancho Panza,"— Mr. Shaw forgets that the wisdom of Sancho Panza is the wisdom of the Spanish peasantry, an accumulation of generations of honest toil and thrifty living—"comes in laughing in a superior manner"— the misinterpretation is Mr. Shaw's; there was nothing superior in the laughter of Mr. Fuller Mellish when last he played the part; 'twas as wholehearted as a yokel's at the village fair—"because he has met a fool in the forest who

> Says very wisely, It is ten o'clock,
> Thus we may see (quoth he) how the world wags.

'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine;
After one hour more 'twill be eleven.
And so from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe;
And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot;
And thereby hangs a tale.

Now, considering that this fool's platitude is precisely the philosophy of Hamlet, Macbeth ('To-morrow and to-morrow, and to-morrow,' etc.), Prospero, and the rest of them, there is something unendurably aggravating in Shakespeare giving himself airs with Touchstone,"— a thing Shakespeare never did; he respected motley as the 'only wear'; there are times in Lear when the fool appears to be the only sane man on the stage —" as if he, the immortal, ever, even at his sublimest, had anything different or better to say himself." Mr. Shaw himself is not wholly guiltless; and, mind you, he was close onto forty, the age at which Shakespeare composed Hamlet, when he penned the above. If that 'fool's platitude' is not all the wisdom of humanity, (and Mr. Shaw himself has offered us no better explanation of the riddle of existence), neither is it all the wisdom of Shakespeare. 'Behold,' says the Psalmist, 'thou hast made my days as it were a span long: and mine age is even as nothing in respect of thee; and verily every man living is altogether vanity. For man walketh in a vain shadow,

and disquieteth himself in vain: he heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them.' And again, 'For when thou art angry all our days are gone; we bring our years to an end, as it were a tale that is told.' 'The ethical view of the universe,' says Mr. Joseph Conrad in A Personal Record, 'involves us at last in so many cruel and absurd contradictions, where the last vestiges of faith, hope, charity, and even of reason itself, seem ready to perish, that I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all. I would fondly believe that its object is purely spectacular; a spectacle for awe, love, adoration, or hate, if you like, but in this view — and in this view alone — never for despair! Those visions, delicious or poignant, are a moral end in themselves.' And again, 'It is sufficient for me to say: J'ai vécu. I have existed, obscure among the wonders and terrors of my time, as the Abbé Sieyès, the original utterer of the quoted words, had managed to exist through the violence, the crimes and the enthusiasms of the French Revolution.' 'Never mind the why and wherefore;' we live, to-morrow we die; it is not asked of any man that he justify his own existence. It is the duty of our fellows to make the best possible use of our talents, to learn wisdom from babes, to hear platitudes

from Mr. Shaw, Shakespeare and the rest. Vanitas vanitatum, all is vanity.

IV

George Henry Lewes once declared that he estimated his acquaintances according to their estimate of Boswell. By the same token we might judge of the world. And in like manner it is possible to appraise every poet and dramatist since the reign of King James solely by what he has written or said concerning William Shakespeare. It has been necessary for me, in writing my play, to read any number of volumes bearing directly and indirectly upon the Elizabethan drama; and I have made some amazing discoveries. Mr. Arnold Bennett, for instance, exhibiting the hollowness of his critical faculty — his praise of Mr. Conrad's Nostromo is a mere following of the herd — in the shrill cry of 'amateur.' To any one at all versed in such matters it is Mr. Bennett and not Shakespeare who appears to be the amateur, though I hesitate to degrade that fine old word to such base usage. Could Mr. Bennett have conceived the Tragedy of Othello, or, being given the story, have written out that final scene, a technical triumph,

leading up as it does to what is perhaps the finest climax in all literature? But I must let Mr. Bennett speak for himself: "I tremble to think what the mandarins and William Archer would say to the technique of Hamlet, could it by some miracle be brought forward to-day as a new piece by a Mr. Shakespeare. They would probably recommend Mr. Shakespeare to consider the ways of Sardou, Henri Bernstein, and Sir Herbert Tree, and be wise. Most positively they would assert that Hamlet was not a play." But why? Why should Mr. Bennett be so positive? What has he done to keep alive the memory of William Shakespeare that he should write in such wise of Mr. Archer and Sir Herbert Tree? I hold no brief in Mr. Archer's defence, yet I consider his notes on Hamlet eminently sane. Is it probable that he would change his opinion were Hamlet a new play? Is he in the habit of indiscriminately praising the Elizabethan dramatists? Mr. Bennett had been better advised — his book, The Author's Craft (I withhold the obvious pun), was published in 1914 — had he trembled to think of James Russell Lowell, who, in 1868, wrote: "Many years ago, while yet Fancy claimed that right in me which Fact has since, to my no small loss, so successfully disputed, I pleased myself with

imagining the play of Hamlet published under some alias, and as the work of a new candidate in literature."— A manifest impossibility, as Lowell must have known, since Hamlet is obviously the work of a mature genius, grown wise through years of experience. —" Then I played, as children say, that it came in regular course before some well-meaning doer of criticisms, who had never read the original (no very wild assumption as things go), and endeavoured to conceive the kind of way in which he would be likely to take it. I put myself in his place, and tried to write such a perfunctory notice as I thought would be likely, in filling his column, to satisfy his conscience. But it was a *tour de force* quite beyond my power to execute without a grimace." Not so with Mr. Arnold Bennett, as we have seen; he keeps a straight face while he blackguards the man to whom we in England and America owe the best of our knowledge of Ibsen, the man to whom, as editor of the poems of Alan Seeger, we in America are especially indebted. Possibly Mr. Bennett is angry with Mr. Archer; possibly he has not forgiven him for pointing out that, as newspaper plays go, The Earth by Mr. James B. Fagan is a better play than Mr. Bennett's What the Public Wants because 'it deals logically with the theme an-

nounced, instead of wandering away into all sorts of irrelevances,' — such as 'making his Napoleon of the press a native of the Five Towns;' be that as it may, I am angry with Mr. Bennett. Why should he presume to use Shakespeare for a stalking-horse?

V

And Mr. John Masefield. He takes his cue from Mr. William Butler Yeats to such an extent that where Mr. Yeats speaks of Henry the Fifth, in quotation marks, as 'Shakespeare's only hero,' Mr. Masefield must perforce go on and reduce the statement to an absurdity by adding that 'Shakespeare was too wise to count any man a hero.' As though men were ever that wise, or foolish. To the oaf (perhaps) all men are oafs, but to the man of vision the greatness of his fellows is as apparent as the salt of the sea. Faulconbridge, Richard the Third, Othello, Lear, Harry Hotspur; are they not all of heroic stature as surely as is the David of Michael Angelo? I do not forget Mr. Masefield his puerile reading between the lines; but I am so enamoured of the prose of Mr. Yeats that I cannot find it in my heart to quarrel with his conclusions, though he insist, (as he does), that 'the world was almost

as empty in the eyes of Shakespeare as it is in the eyes of God.' God looked out upon the world and found it good. I have an idea that Shakespeare was in no haste to leave this vale of tears. He was not aweary of the world; neither is God.

But to return to Mr. Masefield. He says of Shakespeare's women: 'The playing of feminine rôles by boys limited his art and kept his women within the range of thought and emotion likely to be understood by boys.' Limited his art? Just what does Mr. Masefield mean? The Elizabethan was an open-air theatre, and plays were presented in the afternoon by the light of the sun; it was therefore necessary for Shakespeare in writing the Merchant of Venice, Act V. i. to invoke before the eyes of his audience such a picture of the night as would be forever memorable in the literature of the world: —

> The moon shines bright: in such a night as this,
> When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees
> And they did make no noise, in such a night
> Troilus methinks mounted the Troyan walls
> And sigh'd his soul toward the Grecian tents,
> Where Cressid lay that night.

On such a night as well might beggar the artifice of Mr. Belasco did he venture to reproduce

its magic, did young Lorenzo swear his love for Jessica. Shakespeare's art knew no such formal limitations as does the theatre of to-day. So far as we can judge no woman has yet sounded the deeps of Juliet's nature; Rosalind eludes the cleverest of her imitators; Viola remains the loveliest heroine that ever graced a printed page.

VI

But what, as Mr. Shaw once remarked anent our actors, are we to think of America, my native land, the country that gave credence to the Baconian theory? Are we in all honesty a nation of villagers, bumpkins at Bartholomew Fair, to be taken in by the first glib spieler shouting above the clamour of the crowd? In 1856 a Mr. William Smith issued a privately printed letter to Lord Ellesmere, in which he put forth the opinion that William Shakespeare was, by reason of his birth and upbringing, incapable of writing the plays attributed to him. One might as reasonably argue that Lincoln was incapable of the Gettysburg Speech, or that you, dear reader, cannot speak French since you were, unfortunately, born in Yonkers. But the delusion did not take on a serious aspect until, in the same year, a Miss Delia Bacon put for-

ward the same theory in several American magazines: her namesake Francis Bacon, and not Shakespeare, was the author of the plays. In the following year she published a quite unreadable book on the subject. She died insane.

Close on her heels, however, followed another American, Judge Nathaniel Holmes, with a book of no fewer than 696 pages, filled with denunciations of the vagabond William Shakespeare, who, though he could scarcely write his own name and knew no other ambition than that of money-grubbing, had appropriated half the renown of the great Bacon. Since then my fellows this side the seas have published thousands of volumes upon the subject; the stench of their mental rottenness reeks to the doors of Valhalla. And yesterday we scaled the heights, we reached the summit: a Chicago court solemnly handed down a decision confirming Bacon's authorship.

VII

Why is it that people say, 'We know nothing about William Shakespeare?' Just what is it that we do not know? We know when he was born and where, his father's name, his mother's name, their occupations and their po-

sition in society; we know whom he married, when, where, and why; what vocation he followed, and how he prospered; where he lived, and when and where he died — more, all that he thought and did worthy of preservation has been preserved for three long centuries, and is to-day cherished as is the work of no other man, living or dead; his very name connotes more than any other word in our language. How can any one say, 'An octavo page would contain all our knowledge of him?' Should we not include the plays — the tragedies, the comedies, the histories — in our knowledge of Shakespeare? Do we know more of Mr. Roosevelt, or understand him better, because for years he has been featured in the press, because his face has become as familiar as is the caress of a barmaid? I have followed Mr. Roosevelt's career with no little interest, have even read some of his books, and yet I confess myself no better acquainted with him than with the rest of humanity's eminent figures. I could not for the life of me tell you Mrs. Roosevelt's maiden name, whereas every schoolboy has heard of Anne Hathaway in Shottery-side. What Mr. Roosevelt thinks of Shakespeare remains, for me at least, as great a mystery as the riddle of the Sphinx, and is of about as much importance; whereas I know what Shakespeare

would have thought of Mr. Roosevelt: he has painted his portrait full-length in Harry Hotspur, outspoken, impulsive, avid of honour, the popular idol par excellence, the man who set Bolingbroke upon the throne only later to revolt against him and go down in defeat vainly striving to overthrow his reign; he was, as is Mr. Roosevelt, a hero after the heart of Merrie England and Young America, and as such Shakespeare loved him and overlooked his many faults.

VIII

He, Shakespeare, is one of my intimates. I can think of no one, with the possible exception of Mr. Shaw, who has so permeated my life with the genius of his personality. Can it be that I know nothing of a man with whom I am as well acquainted as ever I was with my father, simply because I cannot be certain whether he dined at the Mermaid or the Devil Tavern on Sundays, and where and with whom he slept o' nights? Such details are of no importance; and, even though they were, Shakespeare was right in preserving a certain amount of secrecy with regard to his amours. When Heine said of de Musset, 'He is a young man with a splendid past,' he dismissed de Musset as a

man with a future; but Shakespeare had no past; if ever a man died to rise again, if ever a man was born lord of the after-ages, 'twas this same Will of Stratford-town. Those in search of tattle may turn to George Moore and the decadent poets and painters from whom he has taken his cue; for my part, I see something of the nobleness of Shakespeare's character in this very reticence of his — and this is scarce an attribute of dramatists, reticence: Jonson wearied Drummond, while his guest at Hawthornden for two weeks, by talking almost incessantly of himself; Mr. Shaw's first preface was mainly about Mr. Shaw, and he has spent the remainder of his life living up to that preface. I do not agree with Mr. Moore that after twenty-four an artist's affairs of the heart are but so much raw material for literature. If we cannot immortalize our loves save by dragging them into the confessional and there shouting so loudly concerning our intimacies that all the congregation hears and is most improperly shocked, we are unworthy any woman's love, be she courtesan or queen, we are the merest braggarts, like pimps we would fatten on her shame and should be rudely silenced. Surely it is a kindlier fate that has befallen the Dark Lady of the Sonnets than ever fell to the lot of any other woman kissed

by any other poet since Pan first piped in Arcady; I'll warrant she is not jealous of your inamorata, or of mine.

IX

And who was this same Dark Lady of the Sonnets? In his preface Mr. Shaw says that he has identified her, very reluctantly, with Mistress Mary Fitton. Of course, he has done nothing of the sort; 'tis, as the critics would say, but another of his jokes. He has named a weak wailing creature of his fancy Mary; he had as well boast that he has identified the Dark Lady with the Mother of Christ. 'Tis not Mistress Fitton that cries for mercy from out the pages of his book: we are too well acquainted with her, thanks to Thomas Tyler, to be deluded by any such sham christening. And yet Mr. Shaw was present, as it were, at the birth of the Fitton theory; he went so far as to quote to Thomas Tyler from Euphues Golden Legacie. He has indeed since gone to even greater lengths — he has made of Thomas Tyler a truly fascinating figure, a specialist in pessimism, delighting in a hideous conception which he was pleased to call the Theory of Cycles, according to which the history of man-

kind and the universe keeps on repeating itself without the slightest variation throughout all eternity; he had a goitre, and, according to his theory, he and that goitre have been haunting this earth of ours for thousands and thousands of years; may he, on his next visit to us, derive as great pleasure from Mr. Shaw's preface as I have derived, through Mr. Shaw, from my so short acquaintance with himself as he was in the flesh. I cannot do better than to quote from his edition of the Sonnets — I was lucky enough to pick up a copy at second-hand in Washington; it is very rare: "The dark lady of the Sonnets has been compared with Cleopatra. Thus Professor Dowden: 'May we dare to conjecture that Cleopatra, queen and courtesan, black from "Phœbus' amorous pinches," a "lass unparalleled," has some kinship through the imagination with the dark lady of the virginals?' And the queenly commanding qualities of Mistress Fitton are not to be mistaken. Her character in its strength (Sonnet CL, line 7), resembles that of her royal mistress who declared, 'I have the heart of a king, and of a king of England, too.' She could, on occasion, as we learn from Mrs. Martin, in a document in the Record Office, tuck up her clothes, take off her head-dress, and, at-

tired in a large white cloak, march off 'as though she had been a man' to meet the Earl of Pembroke outside the court. It is entirely in accordance with Mrs. Martin's description that Mistress Fitton takes the lead at the masque and dance at Blackfriars, and that she it is who asks Elizabeth to dance, telling her that her name is Affection." And a very pretty picture we get of her there at that dance; at the marriage of Anne Russell, the queen's favourite maid of honour, to Lord Herbert; a very pretty picture,— even Miss Agnes Strickland seems to have been taken with it: "After supper, the mask came in, and delicate it was to see eight ladies so prettily dressed. Mrs. Fitton led; and after they had done their own ceremonies, these eight lady-maskers chose eight ladies more to dance the measures. 'Mistress Fitton went to the queen and wooed her to dance. Her majesty asked the name of the character she personified; she answered, "Affection." "Affection!" said the queen; "affection's false"; yet her majesty rose and danced.'" And if a queen could not refuse her entreaties, what of a poor player? We cannot connect her directly with William Shakespeare, yet I think that Sir Sidney Lee, the mightiest of the scoffers, will not to-day deny that her

name is forever linked with Shakespeare's; there has been controversy enough pro and con to immortalise a dozen light o' loves.

And she makes a very pretty picture on the stage, so why should I apologise for introducing her into my play? Or, indeed, why should Mr. Shaw? Why should he be in such haste to accept the later suggestions of Mr. Arthur Acheson? They are the merest cobweb-spinning. "In Henry IV, Part I," says Mr. Acheson, "the relations of the Prince and Falstaff reflect Southampton's intimacy with the witty but unprincipled Florio." Mr. Acheson has not an iota of proof to offer for any such statement; and why he should speak of Florio as either witty or unprincipled only Mr. Acheson knows. "My hostess of the tavern," he continues in the same absurdly Achesonian manner, "is," if you please, "the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, Mistress Davenant of the George Inn," with whom, according to Mr. Acheson, both Shakespeare and Southampton were in love. Listen then, Henry IV, Part I, Act I, 2, to the Prince's first mention of Mistress Quickly, the Prince reflecting the feelings of Southampton in love: "Why, what a pox have I to do with my hostess of the tavern?" Surely we cannot afford to have anything more to do with her, or with Mr. Acheson, after that.

X

For centuries, as Sir Henry Newbolt points out in his admirable New Study of English Poetry, a controversy, always ardent, oftentimes violent, has raged concerning the Classical and Romantic in Art. The impersonal theory, with the prestige of a Greek ancestry, had at first undisputed possession of the field; but it was never more than a theory. In practice the Greek artist, like every other human artist, expressed in his work the intuitions of his own spirit. But this was not the account of him given by contemporary critics; his sole aim, according to them, was to produce a certain effect upon his audience. A work of art, they argued, according to Professor Butcher in his edition of Aristotle's Poetics, should be 'a realisation of its own idea,' and so objectively perfect. But, as Sir Henry asks, is a poem or a picture a living personality that it should have an idea of its own, and so 'realise' that idea? Such playing with words is not only futile but dangerous. Alice-Through-the-Looking-Glass is not a thing in the Red Queen's dream, but a dreamer herself. And the theory is impossible in practice. Professor Mackail, in his Oxford Lectures, after telling us that 'the pure Greek

mind was the least romantic of all in history,' and that in the Iliad and Odyssey 'the personal note is as completely absent as it can possibly be from any piece of human workmanship,' goes on to make admissions which show that the possibility is far from being complete. The Iliad is 'instinct with a certain ardour from beginning to end'; 'this ardour is what sets it apart from all other poetry.' In the Odyssey there are personal touches eloquent of personal experience. When we read of the poor maidservant in Ithaca who had to go on grinding corn all night, we know that there is here 'a touch of something actual that had come to the poet himself and struck sharply through him the sense of the obscure labour and unsung pain that underlie the high pageant of life, war, and adventure.' Later he speaks of the 'incommunicable personal quality which Theocritus brought to poetry,' and in his Introduction to the Greek Anthology he traces the development of the psychological element down to Meleager.

Though the Greek theory never quite dies out, the practice of artists everywhere has given it 'the lie direct.' The influence of M. Anatole France has done much to discredit it among the younger critics. For centuries the first sonnet of Sidney's Astrophel and Stella has been the credo of the poets:—

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,
That she, deare Shee, might take some pleasure of my paine —
Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,
Knowledge might pitie winne, and pitie grace obtaine —
I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertaine,
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburn'd brain.

But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay:
Invention, Nature's childe, fled step dame Studie's blowes:
And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.
Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throwes,
Biting my trewand pen, beatinge myselfe for spite —
Fool, said my Muse to me, looke in thy hearte and write!

But, as has been said, this is poetry, not argument; what of the controversy? In one of his Conversations with Eckermann, Goethe said: 'The style of a writer is a true impression of his inner self, if any one would write a clear style, let him first have clearness in his own soul;

and if any one would write a great style, let him see to it that he have a great character.' In another Conversation he put it even more strongly: 'It is the personal character of the writer that brings his meaning before his readers, not the artifices of his talents.' And again: 'The artist must work from within outwards, seeing that, make what contortions he will, he can only bring to light his own individuality.' Joubert was even more dogmatic: 'Objects should never be described except for the purpose of describing the feelings they arouse in us, for language ought to represent at the same moment the thing and the author, the subject and the thought; everything that we say ought to be dyed with us, with the soul of us.' We are reminded of Coleridge's 'infallible test of a blameless style — its untranslateableness in words of the same language without injury to the meaning; language is framed to convey not the object alone, but likewise the character, mood, and intentions of the person who is representing it.'

XI

What then of Mr. John Masefield's criticism of Love's Labour's Lost? "The play is full of the problem of what to do with the

mind. Shall it be filled with study, or spent in society, or burnt in a passion, or tortured by strivings for style, or left as it is? Intellect is a problem to itself. Something of the problem seems (it would be wrong to be more certain) to have made this play not quite impersonal, as good art should be." Not quite impersonal! All good art is intensely personal, is autobiography, the record of the adventures of one's mind in a world of dreams. I confess I cannot understand Mr. Masefield. Here is a poet with a personal vision, an individual viewpoint, a message of his own, a message that resounds throughout the English-speaking world, aligning himself with the most unimaginative of the commentators. Turning his back upon the old free life that formed his character, denying the gods of wind and wave that nursed his infant muse, he sells his heritage for a mess of professorial homage, accepts without question the dicta of the theorists; Holofernes prosing his prattle before the mightiest dreamer born of woman.

Love's Labour's Lost is, as Dr. Brandes has pointed out, a play of two motives. The first is, of course, love — what else should be the theme of a youthful poet's first comedy? The second is language, poetic expression for its own sake — a subject round which all the medi-

tations of Shakespeare must have centred, as, in the midst of new impressions, he set about the formation of a vocabulary and a style.

Mr. Masefield has misread Love's Labour's Lost. It was Shakespeare's intent to satirise the over-luxuriant and far-fetched modes of expression that were characteristic of his age and of ours:—

> HOLOFERNES: The posterior of the day, most generous sir, is liable, congruent and measureable for the afternoon: the word is well cull'd, chosen; sweet and apt, I do assure you, sir; I do assure.

while Biron cries:—

> Lend me the flourish of all gentle tongues,—
> Fie, painted rhetoric!

Mr. Masefield's theories concerning Shakespeare are, if the truth be known, not his own, but Mr. Yeats' or those of the Cambridge editors. And yet make what contortions he will, assume the most owlish and scholarly of expressions, we see, beneath the lion's fell, 'a very gentle beast.' Mr. Masefield cannot escape his own personality. He comes away from Shakespeare unchanged. Years later he writes of the Anzac Expedition with a verbal grandiosity that is rather sickening, that belies the mute heroism of the men who fought and died so bravely bat-

tling vainly against the Turks. As Mr. Francis Hackett points out, in a recent review of Mr. Masefield's work, he (Mr. Masefield) too often attempts to be a little nobler than life. 'A great writer takes beauty by the hand.' In the Tragedy of Nan Mr. Masefield is too lofty, strutting among the stars, as it were, on stilts; he seems to be carried away by the glamour of his subject; he cannot write as people speak. But why? Apparently because he believes that there are phrases lovelier than life, more exquisite than nature, more instinct with romance than is humanity. It was to ridicule any such credo that Shakespeare wrote the greater part of Love's Labour's Lost: —

> Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise,
> Three pil'd hyperboles, spruce affectation,
> Figures pedantical: these summer-flies
> Have blown me full of maggot ostentation.
> I do forswear them; and I here protest,
> By this white glove, (how white the hand, God knows,)
> Henceforth my wooing mind shall be express'd
> In russet yeas, and honest kersey noes.

True the parody is often as tedious as the mannerisms it would ridicule,— but Shakespeare was young. Not until A Midsummer Night's Dream do we find him rising to the full height of his genius. And what a rise it

was, illumining the world! Surely his sun has never set since the dawn that followed that night in June.

XII

Professor Kittredge, in the address referred to, ridicules rather roughly, or so it seems to me, those who profess to discover something of Shakespeare's personality in his plays. "If Hamlet is Shakespeare, so also is Claudius, and so are Banquo and Fluellen, Falstaff and Prince Hal. . . . All are authentic, all are genuine, all are sincere. . . . Each, therefore, contains some fragment of Shakespeare's nature, or registers some reaction of his idiosyncrasy. That is most certain. But how shall we tackle this stupendous problem in biochemistry?" Who said 'Hamlet is Shakespeare?' Shakespeare stands sponsor for Hamlet, for Falstaff, for Prince Hal, as Mr. Shaw for his Candida, or for Anne, Shaw's Anne, and his alone. The professor is destroying a monster of his own creation, "a compendium of humanity, a composite photograph, quite destitute of salient features, which," as he says, "is assuredly not Shakespeare." And yet Shakespeare was the creator of this 'compendium of humanity.' Reflected there we see the heart of him, 'great

with child to speak.' As every wayside flower lifts up its head to sing in praise of God, so Falstaff, Lear, Dogberry, Brutus, Caliban and all the rest tell all day long of that great soul that yearned them into being. I cannot do better than quote Sir Henry Newbolt in support of my contention that the poet who exhibits so intense an interest in the personality of others, not only in his plays, but in his sonnets: —

> What is your substance, whereof are you made
> That millions of strange shadows on you tend?

who knew that none could say more of his beloved —

> Than this rich praise that you alone are you;

would have been the last man in this world, born king of so limitless a realm as the fair field of his fancy, to forego his heritage and live self-exiled in his art.

"It is a matter of common agreement that Shakespeare the Dramatist had a power that may be called infinite and hidden: infinite, because it is exhibited in a whole world of life: hidden, because it is exhibited only through the inhabitants of that world and never apart from them. But to add to this the words 'impassive' and 'impersonal' (as Flaubert does) is a violent contradiction in terms. Activity and

personality cannot be found anywhere in a higher degree than in Shakespeare's combination of creative force and ingenuous artistic concentration. He does not, as does Flaubert, treat men as he would treat mastodons or crocodiles for a museum; he does not stuff them with straw; what he puts into them is that which is in himself, the breath of his own vitality. So strong is the impression which he thus produces that critics like Dr. Brandes have believed it possible to trace in his works not only the movement of his spirit, but the actual footprints of his external life. Others, finding always in his characters exactly what they find in the characters of the world around them, imagine that there must have been over and above all these, a Shakespeare of whose character no record is left, a Shakespeare who succeeded in concealing himself. But Shakespeare's ingenuous concentration is the reverse of an attempt at concealment; it is the negation of a pose, a self-disguise, an adopted point of view. If he had a wider and more comprehensive vision of human life than Byron or other poets, if he treated it more tolerantly and was more completely absorbed in the study of it, that is only to say that he had a different and more intense personality."

XIII

Professor Kittredge draws a lively sketch of King Claudius —' who has fared hard at the hands of the moralising critics and the actors ' — superbly regal, confronting an armed mob with serene disdain, silencing the rash and dangerous Laertes with a glance, sympathizing with Ophelia, divided from herself and her fair reason, ' without the which we are pictures or mere brutes ' ; ' the same Claudius who could not pray because his intellect was so pitilessly honest that self-deceit was beyond his power; the same Claudius who faced his own damnation, knowing he was the son of wrath because he could not give up his crown or his queen, and was too sublime to juggle with his conscience.' The professor draws a lively sketch of King Claudius, and then jeers at those who see, or say they see, something of the creator in such a creation. And yet we know the professor could not have painted the portrait of the king. There is, for one thing, too much of the schoolma'am about him. Shakespeare was not a Pharisee; he was tolerant of humanity; he lavished the best of his art upon Dame Quickly :—

> Tilly-fally, Sir John, ne'er tell me; your ancient swaggerer comes not in my doors. I was before

> Master Tisick, the debuty, t'other day; and, as he said to me, 'twas no longer ago than Wednesday last, 'I' good faith, neighbour Quickly,' says he; Master Dumbe, our minister, was by then; 'neighbour Quickly,' says he, 'receive those that are civil; for,' said he, 'you are in an ill name!' Now a' said so, I can tell whereupon; 'for,' says he, 'you are an honest woman, and well thought on; therefore take heed what guests you receive; receive,' says he, 'no swaggering companions.' There comes none here; you would bless you to hear what he said; no, I'll no swaggerers.

He put into the mouth of Pistol as vaunting a phrase as man ever uttered:—

> Why, then the world's mine oyster,
> Which I with sword will open.

The natural tendency of his youth had been to see good everywhere, even (perhaps) in Claudius. He felt, with his King Henry, that 'there is some soul of goodness in things evil.' But as he matured the misery of life presented itself before him in all the abject awfulness of its reality; it seemed to appal him. There was the social problem, the problem of what one should do, must do for one's neighbour; it seemed to weigh upon his heart:—

> Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,

> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these?

The later Shakespeare could not jest concerning the weakness, the folly, the sin of another as lightly as did the young man new come to town. It was especially the potency of evil that impressed him; the selfishness, be it ever so regal, which brought so much woe into the world. It was on compulsion, because my Lord Chamberlain's company was running behind Henslowe's, — Henslowe who did not risk public favour with Hamlet and Julius Cæsar,— that he made of Measure for Measure a comedy, but he himself did not laugh. Victorien Sardou wrote a tragedy, La Tosca, upon the same theme. It was, as Dr. Brandes has pointed out, clearly his indignation at the growing Pharisaism in matters pertaining to sexual morality that attracted Shakespeare to so unpleasant a parable. He was in earnest, however; though the pit rocked with laughter, he was as earnest as is Mr. Shaw, and surely only a fool will deny the purpose in the latter's plays. What fascinated Shakespeare in Hamlet, though more particularly in Macbeth and Othello, was to show how evil, having injected some of its poison into a man's veins, slowly infects the whole man. We see him, with most of the illu-

sions of his youth gone, brooding over this subject in the later tragedies. He had, of course, recognised it earlier; in Richard the Third, for instance, but Richard is the same man from beginning to end. Macbeth is a study in moral degradation; Iago is a villain without a peer in literature — he even deceives us to-day and we know him for what he is, the man who sold his friend for his own advancement.

Claudius — of course, it fares hard with him at the hands of the moralists as it fared hard with him in life, or rather, at Shakespeare's hands; but he is a secondary character, scarce a study in progressive depravity. Only a professor, with all the lovely heroines to choose from, would take him as a text on which to preach concerning Shakespeare. He is, of course, finished, detailed, a wonderful characterisation; this goes without saying, since he is Shakespeare's; but when the curtain rises he is already the rottenest thing in Denmark, and when he dies, he dies unrepentant, the fool of his lust, foredoomed to disaster. He may have had a good angel about him, but, as Falstaff said of his page, 'the devil outbid him.'

The professor defends Claudius against his traducers. This is very noble and very unnecessary. But when he says that because we cannot identify Shakespeare with Claudius, we cannot

see anything of Shakespeare in Claudius he is . . . I have a friend, a very literary friend, who once triumphantly pointed out to me that there was a world of difference between Jack Tanner, pursued and married apparently somewhat against his will by the wholly delightful, quite irresistible Ann, and his creator Mr. Shaw, since the latter managed to remain a bachelor until long after his fortieth year. One might as well argue that we who have only read Miss Julia know nothing of Strindberg simply because we have not shared his bed and board. The externals of life, the physical adventures of existence are, in large part, accidental, quite beyond our control; the adventures of one's mind are a true index to one's character, and they vary as we vary; they make us what we are. 'Tis a trite aphorism, but true enough for my purpose: A man is as he thinks. And, as I have said, we know what Shakespeare thought.

Bobby Burns was a poet, not a ploughboy; he would still have been a poet had he been born in Boston and educated at Harvard under Professor Kittredge.

XIV

The professor insists that we 'can never read the riddle of another's personality,' can

never understand our fellows, but must live on, isolated, only by the merest chance and in the commonest affairs of life sympathising with our friends. All art is a refutation of any such statement. What is Hamlet but just such an interpretation of another as he deems impossible? Does not Falstaff, with his page at his heels, walk before us for all the world 'like a sow that hath overwhelmed all her litter but one?' Is he not a living creature, almost as immortal as the gods, as real as you or I? Can we not hear the tones of Harry Percy's voice, or the laughter of Jaques in the forest of Arden? And what is criticism 'but a reading of the riddle of another's personality'? 'Tis no 'idle revery,' as the professor would have us believe, 'dignified with the name of biographic fact.' Biography has nothing whatever to do with it. Boswell understood Johnson, and his understanding took no account of the accidents of time and place. Shakespeare understood Antony and as he sat at his table writing again the tale of the huge proconsul's love for Cleopatra, he lived over in his mind the years of his own life when such another as the imperial gypsy of the Nile held him in thrall, the willing slave of her caprice. Why should the professor wish to dispense with all that has been read between the lines of Shakespeare's plays? I

grant you he does not understand Shakespeare, but why should he mock at those who do? Or set himself up against the saner of the critics to overthrow their discoveries with a careless wave of the hand? 'Of all methods and ideals in the study of Shakespeare's dramas, the most desperately wrong is that which seeks, exclusively or principally, to discover the man in his works.' And to prove it, he proves that Shakespeare is not Claudius or Iago or Lear or Rosalind.

But he fears we may think him 'malicious' in his selection of Claudius and Iago and the rest as 'representative' of Shakespeare, and to repel any such insinuation puts forward Pistol. He quotes what he considers 'an outrageous example of frantic Pistolese': —

> Shall pack-horses
> And hollow pamper'd jades of Asia,
> Which cannot go but thirty mile a day,
> Compare with Cæsars and with Cannibals,
> And Trojan Greeks? Nay, rather damn them with
> King Cerberus — and let the welkin ring!
> Shall we fall foul for toys?

Here, according to the Professor, we have 'the real Shakespeare,' ('who loved words for their sound, and not for their sense alone — otherwise he could not have been a poet'), 'lux-

uriating in pure prodigality of vocal reverberation — borrowing Gargantua's mouth — anglicising honorificabilitudinitalibus.' And then, some more of his Latin — *haec fabula docet* and *hic et ubique* — and he asks: 'Have I not proved my point?'

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.

The words are simple, common, such as a child might use, such as Shakespeare loved. In Synge's plays, as Mr. C. E. Montague has remarked, the English of the Elizabethans seems to have come back to us from Ireland almost as fresh as it was when the Elizabethan settlers left it there; it is the English of the King James' Version, straightforward, lithe and clean — 'Isn't it a pitiful thing when there's nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?' and, again, when the mother whose six sons are dead, says: 'It's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time surely'; and 'I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening.' Keats was haunted day and night by Edgar's question: 'Hark! canst thou not hear the sea?' 'Beauty like sorrow dwelleth everywhere,' is as fine as anything in Ben Jonson.

There is but one greatly poetic phrase in Stephen Phillips' Poems, (The Woman with the Dead Soul, etc.), where Lazarus rising from the dead hears how 'the sea murmured again'; there is little in tragedy more beautiful than Giovanni's line 'I did not know the dead could have such hair.' Is it the thought or the sound that makes these words memorable?

The professor should read Hazlitt's essay, in Table Talk, on Familiar Style; I quote from a note in the first edition: 'I have heard of such a thing as an author, who makes it a rule never to admit a monosyllable into his vapid verse. Yet the charm and sweetness of Marlow's lines depended often on their being made up almost entirely of monosyllables.' Hazlitt had been objecting and rightly to Dr. Johnson's style because there was no discrimination, no selection, no variety in it, none but 'tall, opaque words' taken from the 'first row of the rubric,'—words with the greatest number of syllables, such words as the professor would have our genuine poets employ to the virtual exclusion of Mr. Kipling's virile Anglo-Saxon, to the practical extinction of Mr. Shaw's trenchant and simple English. 'If a fine style depended on this sort of arbitrary pretension, it would be fair to judge of an author's elegance by the measurement of his words, and

the substitution of foreign circumlocutions (with no precise associations) for the mother-tongue.' Hazlitt was eminently sane. 'The proper force of words lies not in the words themselves, but in their application.' Though we are, according to R. L. S., 'mighty fine fellows', we can none of us write like William Hazlitt; that we are 'mighty fine fellows' is, according to Henley, a 'Great Perhaps,' that we can none of us write like Hazlitt merely indubitable. The professor apparently does not agree with Hazlitt. But then, why should he? There are two sides to every argument. Mr. Cradock of Gumley, a friend of Johnson's — 'of all the men I ever knew Dr. Johnson was the most instructive' — tells in his Memoirs, which were printed in 1826-28, many amusing anecdotes, among them several concerning Goldsmith. It is from him that we get the oft-repeated lament: 'while you are nibbling about elegant phrases, I am obliged to write half a volume'; and hear first of Goldsmith's delightful proposition for improving Gray's Elegy by putting out 'an idle word in every line.' As thus: —

The curfew tolls the knell of day,
The lowing herd winds o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his way,—

and so forth. Lord Lytton, so I learn from Mr. Austin Dobson, in an excellent article in the Edinburgh Review, ingeniously exploded this piece of profanation by shearing down Shakespeare's 'gaudy, babbling, and remorseless day,' on the same principle, to a bare 'the day.' I would not have my readers think all adjectives superfluous; some men are fools and dullards, others merely malicious, crying out against Nineveh because her women are beautiful.

XV

The professor is most unfortunate in his quotation, but still more so in his comment. The talk of the braggart Pistol, (the swaggerer to whom Dame Quickly objected), is an anthology of playhouse bombast. He is not only highly amusing in himself, but has given Shakespeare an opportunity to gird at the 'prodigality of vocal reverberation,' the robustious style of the earlier tragic dramatists, a style repulsive to his finer poetic sensibilities. He parodies Marlowe's Tamburlaine in the outburst quoted by Professor Kittredge. It occurs in Henry IV, Part II, Act II, 4, 'the finest tavern scene ever written,' according to Mr. Masefield, an admitted authority on such scenes. In Tam-

burlaine, Second Part, Act II, 4, the passage runs:—

> Hallo, ye pamper'd jades of Asia,
> What? Can ye draw but twenty miles a day?

Further on, in the same scene, he makes fun of George Peele's Turkish Mahomet and Hyren, the fair Greek, when Pistol, alluding to his sword, exclaims, 'Have we not Hyren here?' And again it is Peele who is aimed at when Pistol says to the hostess:—

> Then feed and be fat, my fair Calipolis;
> Come give's some sack,
> Si fortune me tormente, sperato me contento.
> Fear we broadsides? no, let the fiend give fire:
> Give me some sack: and, sweetheart, lie out there.
> [*Laying his sword on the table*]
> Come we to full points here; and are etceteras nothing?

In the Battle of Alcazar, Muley Mahomet brings his wife some flesh on the point of the sword and says:—

> Hold thee, Calipolis, feed and faint no more!

In the course of a scholarly essay on Dr. Johnson's Writings, Sir Leslie Stephen says: "'The style is the man' is a very excellent aphorism, though some eminent writers have lately pointed out that Buffon's original remark

was 'le style c'est de l'homme.' That only proves that, like many other good sayings, it has been polished and brought to perfection by the process of attrition in numerous minds, instead of being struck out at a blow by a solitary thinker. From a purely logical point of view, Buffon may be correct: but the very essence of an aphorism is that slight exaggeration which makes it more biting whilst less rigidly accurate. According to Buffon, the style might belong to a man as an acquisition rather than as a natural growth." Boswell has somewhere a discussion as to the writers who helped to form Johnson's style, whereas Johnson, like all other men of strong individuality, formed his style as he formed his legs — 'buffeting with his books.' And in like manner the style of William Shakespeare was formed; listening to the brilliant talk of his contemporaries, reading the wonderful translations then being issued from the press. The hopes, the aspirations, the romance of the age took seed and flowered in the secret places of his heart.

And nothing is so evident as the impression made by the gorgeous and violent rhetoric of Marlowe upon the mind of the youthful Shakespeare. Marlowe's influence is unmistakable in Titus Andronicus and the early histories, not only in the style and versification, but in the lav-

ish effusion of blood through which we wade ankle-deep. Shakespeare's Aaron and Peele's barbarous Muley Mahomet are cousins, the offspring of the Jew of Malta and his henchman Ithamore. It is probable that Shakespeare was later somewhat ashamed of his spring madness and took an early opportunity of ridiculing the traducers of his youth.

And the professor? To paraphrase Henley, we have all of us listened long enough to the professor on Shakespeare; the everlasting pity of it is that we shall never listen to Shakespeare on the professor. He (the professor) must think of personality as of something about as intangible as oil-cloth, and of poetry as words 'full of sound and fury signifying nothing.'

XVI

There has been born into this world but one man capable, had he lived to maturity, of ousting William Shakespeare from his place upon the heights; and that man was Christopher Marlowe, the son of a cobbler in Canterbury. He was a foundation scholar at the King's School in his native town; matriculated at Cambridge in 1580; took the degree of B.A. in 1583, and of M.A. at the age of twenty-three after he had left the University. He appeared in London

(so we gather from an old ballad) as an actor at the Curtain Theatre, but had the misfortune to break his leg upon the stage, and was, no doubt on this account, compelled to give up acting. His first dramatic work, Tamburlaine the Great, seems to have been written, at latest, in 1587. He has a special claim upon our affections; he belongs to the glorious company of those who have died young — Chatterton, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Dowson, Rupert Brooke, Alan Seeger and Richard Hovey, our own Hovey, as Seeger is ours for all that he died fighting for France. We may well believe Mr. Bliss Carman when he tells us:

> Oh, but life went gaily, gaily,
> In the house of Idiedaily.

And it went gaily with young Marlowe, for he was a son of the morning. As Lowell has said, 'he brought the English unrhymed pentameter (which had hitherto justified but half its name by being always blank and never verse) to a perfection of melody, harmony, and variety which has never been surpassed.' He was a titan struggling magnificently against old gods and outworn superstititons, such another as Prince Lucifer, the Lord of Light; and standing on the summits of Parnassus, he casts a shadow across the after-ages which only the sun of

Shakespeare can lighten. It would be impossible to overestimate his value as a leader and pioneer in English poetry. Algernon Charles Swinburne, himself a poet, and one of the ablest of the many critics who have written concerning the art and culture of the Elizabethan era, says, in his article in the Encyclopœdia Brittanica: "To no other poet have so many of the greatest among poets been so directly indebted; nor was any great writer's influence upon his fellows more utterly and unmixedly an influence for good. He first, and he alone, guided Shakespeare in the right way of work; his music in which there is no echo of any man's before him, found its own echo in the more prolonged but hardly more exalted harmony of Milton. He is the greatest discoverer, the most daring and inspired leader, in all our poetic literature. Before him there was neither a genuine blank verse nor a genuine tragedy in our language. After his arrival the way was prepared, the paths were made straight for Shakespeare."

And Marlowe was Shakespeare's senior by a scant three months. He died in the twenty-ninth year of his youth, beloved by all the gods on high Olympus, mourned for centuries in every land where European culture is known or spoken of. He was stabbed, so tradition has it, in the eye with his own dagger, wrenched from

his hand by a certain Francis Archer, his rival in amour; they had quarrelled over a serving-maid.

XVII

Mr. Shaw, however, confidently asserts that had he been born in 1556 (thereby antedating Marlowe by eight years) instead of 1856, he would have taken to blank verse and given Shakespeare a harder run for his money than all the other Elizabethans put together; Mr. Shaw who is about as daring as the humour of Punch, whose affair with Melpomene was broken off on account of his friendship for Mrs. Warren. Mr. Shaw is a writer of prose as witness the speeches he has put into the mouth of his young poet Marchbanks in Candida. I am always amused by Mr. Shaw's efforts of serious intent, his wild raging before the gods we others have erected in the temples of Apollo, the gods we refuse to remove or replace with such commonplace images as he deems lovely, usually some practical variant of the golden calf. I am by no means ashamed of being accused of a lack of humour. God wot, there is no lack of it in this world where thousands jest daily in the face of almost certain destruction. I shall interpret Mr. Shaw's arrogant self-praise literally. It is of the essence of Shaw and his middle-class —

nothing is so middle-class as the constant assumption of superiority — his middle-class attitude towards all that is inspiring and beautiful in human history. He scoffs at 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild,' (while Miss Rebecca West hails him 'a spiritual teacher'), as 'a snivelling modern invention, with no warrant in the gospels.' Whereas, as Mr. Frank Harris has pointed out, it was Jesus who first in all the world advised us to turn the other cheek, and to give the cloak to the robber who had taken the coat. Does he not teach us to do good to our enemies? How does the Sermon on the Mount begin? 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' We cannot mistake his meaning; he strikes the same note again: 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.' As a pioneer, a leader in the vanguard of thought, Mr. Shaw takes rank, not with Marlowe, but with the man who discovers a skeleton in his closet, writes a thesis on the subject, and hopes to deliver a lecture at the Bodleian, thereby adding to our knowledge of anthropology. What Mr. Shaw, in all probability, could have done in Elizabethan England, he has done in the England of to-day: satirised the fads and the follies of the butcher, the baker, the candlestickmaker, and worked himself up into something of a passion over the 'idolatry' of Shakespeare's admirers. He has taken his

cue from his master Ben Jonson. They are as like as an Englishman and an Irishman well can be, and still retain some traces of their nationality. Jonson had an idea that he could rail the public into approbation; Mr. Shaw — well, the Poetaster reappears generations later as Fanny's First Play. Jonson wrote very learnedly of the use of cosmetics during the reign of the Roman Tiberius; Mr. Shaw quotes long paragraphs to uphold his references to Cleopatra's cure for baldness. Both depict Cæsar with a sense of humour: Mr. Shaw's Cæsar and Cleopatra, and the tragedy of Catiline, Act V, 6, where Cæsar hands over to Cato (who has openly accused him of receiving secret messages from the conspirators, even in the Senate) the letter containing declarations of love not from Catiline, but from Servilia, Cato's sister. Thereby they (Mr. Shaw and Ben Jonson) differ radically from Shakespeare, whose Cæsar is as serious and pompous as a midwest congressman. Mr. Shaw is by all odds the most interesting, perhaps the finest figure in England to-day; but his knowledge of sociology is no more original or startling than was Jonson's knowledge of the classics. Indeed there is, as I have hinted, a strange analogy between the two. Neither one has kept to the high level of his earliest achievements; Jonson's work no-

ticeably deteriorated after Bartholomew Fair, Mr. Shaw has failed to live up to the fine promise of Candida or Man and Superman.

XVIII

Professor Dowden has somewhere said that had Shakespeare died at forty, the world might have mourned his loss, but would certainly have been consoled in the thought that he had reached his zenith; no man could surpass Hamlet — and then, in rapid succession, followed Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, Cymbeline, A Winter's Tale, The Tempest. Nevertheless Mr. Shaw is convinced that Shakespeare was very like himself. This is reducing Shakespeare to an absurdity. Is it always in terms of Mr. Shaw that the men and women of this world are to be judged? Because he cannot coin words but must resort to tablets and notebooks in order that he may treasure up for future use the chance phrases dropped by the careless folk with whom he brushes elbows, is Shakespeare to be depicted upon the stage as a 'mere snapper-up of inconsidered trifles'? Mr. Shaw himself expressly states that Shakespeare was not Autolycus. Why then this Jonsonian wail against the age into

which he was born, the posterity that can never hope to understand either Shakespeare or himself? Is it not a disparagement of Shakespeare's genius to place him in company with a common Beefeater, and then put into the mouth of the latter the more exquisite phrases, to portray Shakespeare hanging upon the words of a warder? Does Mr. Shaw know nothing of Elizabethan England? Is it possible that he has not heard of the extent of Shakespeare's vocabulary? An Italian opera libretto contains at most eight hundred words; a well educated Englishman will rarely use more than three or four thousand; there are but fifty-six hundred and forty-two in the Old Testament; whereas Shakespeare employed more than fifteen thousand words in his poems and plays alone. He lived in an age of expansion and splendour, an age of high lights and total eclipse; life was a great adventure then; men sailed away across uncharted seas toward unknown coasts and returned, if at all, rich beyond the dreams of a school-girl. We to-day, to quote Lowell again, cannot read Hakluyt's voyages (much less Henry IV) without amazement to find common sailors habitually using a diction that rises at times, as they tell of their wanderings, to well-nigh Homeric beauty and power. The English language has deteriorated and Mr. Shaw is at a

disadvantage; he needs must write while England, at a loss for words, raving in Billingsgate, fights for air. There are no more Raleighs. Lloyd-George is as unheroic as the Wales from which he hails. There is a gap between the speech of books and that of life. Walter Pater laid himself open to the charge of writing English as though it had been a dead language; and indeed, so far as poetry is concerned, it is almost as dead as Latin. How then should Mr. Shaw, a satirist without a peer, without a fairyland, who vows he can see nothing in the heavens at night save ' stars higgledy-piggledy every which way,' who refers to Fletcher as ' a facile blank verse penny-a-liner,' a puritan bordering upon old maidishness, how should Mr. Shaw hope to speak for Shakespeare? He cannot recreate the past save in his own image, how then should he summon from the grave the recreant soul of a dreamer and bid him walk as in the flesh before the wondering eyes of man — man so prone to believe in resurrected ghosts? There is but one Shakespearean touch in the whole affair, preface and play, and that is the taking over wholesale by Mr. Shaw of another's situation. But what a situation! Shakespeare, who cared no more for the queen than I do, madly protesting love for her, utterly oblivious of the livery that in reality weighed upon his

shoulders as heavy as did the albatross about the neck of the Mariner; the livery which he, at the first plausible opportunity, threw off, preferring provincial trade and life with a woman eight years his senior, eight thousand years his mental inferior, to all the plaudits of the pit gained under license such as is to-day allowed a dog.

XIX

I have said elsewhere that I believe William Herbert — the Earl of Pembroke, to whom the First Folio Edition of Shakespeare's plays was dedicated by the editors Heminges (the reputed creator of the rôle of Falstaff) and Condell, life-long friends of Shakespeare and members with him of the Lord Chamberlain's company of players — to have been the Mr. W. H. of the Dedication, the Mr. W. H. whom Thomas Thorpe, the publisher, describes as 'the only begetter of these insuing sonnets,' and to whom the major portion of the Sonnets was addressed. It is only right that I, who have been so bold in my arraignment of others, should give some reason for so believing, though there be reason enough in all conscience without further debate on my part. Let me go back to the beginning and quote Mr. Havelock Ellis, to some

extent my literary godfather and, as such, standing sponsor for no end of my literary sins — as Bobby Service has it, ' the other kind don't matter,' though I have a character somewhat resembling Mr. Shaw's in that it needs a good deal of looking after.

In that sanest and best of all of to-day's books, Affirmations, in the book of which I make quite as good use as many another man doth of ' a death's head or a memento mori,' Mr. Havelock Ellis remarks, *inter al:* " In literature, as elsewhere, art should only be approached as we would approach Paradise, for the sake of its joy. It would be well, indeed, if we could destroy or forget all that has ever been written about the world's great books, even if it were once worth while to write those books about books. How happy, for instance, the world might be if there were no literature about the Bible, if Augustine and Aquinas and Calvin and thousands of smaller men had not danced on it so long, stamping every page of it into mire, that now the vision of a single line, in its simple sense, is almost an effort of inspiration." How happy the world if every man might judge of Shakespeare for himself as he would of a friend, his mind unbefogged by the casual comments of some high-school instructor concerning Hamlet, Othello, Lear or the man himself. Mr. Gouv-

erneur Morris knows Conrad and says of those who are now engaged in reading him for the first time — 'Oh, how I envy them!' But we cannot read Shakespeare for the first time; he has already been read to us when we were far too young to understand. He has become as much a part of our civilisation as is the sun; all the novelty has been worn from his lines by the fingering of an almost endless line of annotators; the beauty of his verse is lost amid the droning voices of his interpreters. And yet sometimes, as we turn the pages of his books, the splendour of his humanity seems to dawn upon us anew; and what an adventure it is to come upon his lines thus suddenly, as though for the first time! Those are red-letter days indeed, ushered in by music such as the seraphs use. "All my life long," continues Mr. Ellis, "I have been casting away the knowledge I have gained from books about literature, and from opinions about life, and coming to literature itself or to life itself, a slow and painful progress towards that Heaven of knowledge where a child is king."

XX

I am a farmer in Southern Maryland, and have been lucky in that I have been unable to

read the books about literature to which Mr. Ellis refers, have been unable to listen to opinions concerning life; I have had little leisure. I have been busy with life; I left Cornell in my Freshman year, cooked in an all-night restaurant in Klamath Falls, tended sheep camp, herded horses, rode for a season on the range in Northern Montana and again in Eastern Oregon, laid pavement for the Warren Construction Company, surveyed for the Government. Until a few years ago when I happened to take down from among my books Mr. Shaw's Dark Lady of the Sonnets, I had never heard of the controversy raging around the impassive figure of the sonneteer. I come to literature and to life with an open mind. I never was a decadent. I do not have to disabuse my brain of foregone conclusions. I have not spent years listening to the dry-as-dust arguments of scholasticism concerning a poet who was once as alive as is Mr. Cohan to-day, who should be met as one goes out to meet a distinguished guest, and not relegated to the laboratory for dissection by scientists. A word may be sufficient for the wise — perhaps they already know all you or I have to tell. Myself I am still young and eager to learn. So I read Mr. Shaw's preface and fell in love with Thomas Tyler; then I read the play and fell out with Mr. Shaw. So I reread the

preface. I came to where he quotes the one hundred and thirtieth sonnet. Imagine, says Mr. Shaw, imagine Mary Fitton reading that! And I tried to imagine just how she would feel, — with what success, you who read my play are best able to say.

But I was interested in Mistress Fitton and in Thomas Tyler; and I became interested in Shakespeare entirely apart from his work as a dramatist, interested in the humdrum everyday life of the man and his neighbours. As luck would have it, I studied first Mr. William Archer's edition of Dr. Brandes' William Shakespeare; for years I have had an immense admiration for Dr. Brandes. Then I bought more books on the subject than I could well afford — I had to write a play to recoup my fallen fortunes. I have bought Sir Sidney Lee's various volumes on the Elizabethans; I have bought practically everything I could lay my hands on.

XXI

Sir Sidney Lee has written a life of Shakespeare; some say the life of Shakespeare; be that as it may Sir Sidney Lee differs radically from Boswell concerning just what it is that constitutes a life. For us (thanks to Boswell) Jon-

son is a living, thinking, sentient creature, a contemporary; Sir Sidney Lee cuts Shakespeare up into a mass of data, speaks of him as I might of some catalogue in the British Museum, some mummy dead and done with concerning whom a student may wax erudite without fearing contradiction from the less learned average of humanity. Sir Sidney Lee refers to Marlowe as casually as Billy Sunday does to God, and with about as much exactitude.— You remember Mr. Kipling's Tomlinson who patted his god on the head. He (Sir Sidney Lee) doubts the Manningham Anecdote which I quote in my Dramitis Personæ, and accepts as authentic the tradition of Marlowe's violent end; there is as much truth, and no more, in the one account as in the other. "Tamburlaine, the Jew of Malta, Dr. Faustus and Edward the Second were among the best applauded productions through the year 1594." Why the year 1594, the year following Marlowe's death? Why not 'of the age'? Were they all written in one year? Both parts of Tamburlaine were entered in the Stationers' Register on August 14, 1590; the first part of the play was probably produced three years before, the second part in 1588. Dr. Faustus was acted early in 1589. The earliest mention of the Jew of Malta occurs in Henslowe's Diary, where a performance of the tragedy is

noted as taking place on February 26, 1592; but it is implied that the play was not then new; its composition is conjecturally placed about 1590. If Sir Sidney Lee is going to stoop to quibbling in his debates on the vexed subject of the Sonnets, is going to refer to Dr. Brandes' William Shakespeare as 'a rather fanciful study,' he should himself adhere more closely to the truth.

XXII

And the truth is Sir Sidney Lee is not much of a critic. He is a patient reader of old documents, a careful compiler of all sorts of statistics, all sorts of twice-told tales; but if you really desire to meet with Shakespeare turn to the Sonnets or the plays, and not to Sir Sidney Lee.

For instance, he does not believe Lord William Herbert to have been the Mr. W. H. of the Dedication and to prove it (Thorpe's edition of the Sonnets is dated 1609) states that the Earl of Pembroke was spoken of as Lord Herbert in 1601 and referred to as the Earl of Pembroke thereafter; to have addressed him as 'Mr.' would have been a star-chamber offence. He then goes on to prove that Thorpe cared very little whether he offended or not. It has

been suggested that Ben Jonson referred to Thorpe's inscription in his dedication of the Epigrams to the Earl of Pembroke: 'While you cannot change your merit, I dare not change your title. . . . When I made them I had nothing in my conscience to expressing of which I did need a cipher;' implying thereby that some one, presumably as I have said the reckless Thorpe, had referred in some similar dedication to the Earl of Pembroke as other than My Lord, or as plain Mr. W. H., employing a cipher — initials — to conceal in some sort his connection with an unauthorized edition of another's work, i.e. the pirated publication of Shakespeare's sonnets. Jonson, one of Shakespeare's intimates and a friend of Pembroke's, naturally knew the inside story of this transaction. William Hall, a publisher, who 'flits rapidly across the stage of literary history' was 'in all probability,' according to Sir Sidney Lee, 'the Mr. W. H. of Thorpe's Dedication of the Sonnets,' since he it must have been who procured for Thorpe the manuscript, since he was a personal friend of Thorpe's,— the various volumes they published issued from the same press, the press of George Eld, a printer at the White Horse, in Fleet Lane, Old Bailey, London. Now it does not seem to me that this is a very good reason for believing them to have

been fast friends. And why should Hall, who between 1609 and 1614 published some twenty volumes, turn so valuable a manuscript as that of Shakespeare's Sonnets — Shakespeare was very probably even then spoken of as the most important poet of the day — over to Thorpe who in the same period of time was able to publish but twelve volumes? And they would seem to have had but little in common; Hall published nothing but sermons, displays of heraldry, theological essays; Thorpe published Marlowe's Lucan, Jonson's Volpone, three plays by Chapman, a volume on Epictetus, another on St. Augustine, and he was at one time the owner of the manuscript of Marlowe's Hero and Leander. Further we can connect him directly with the Earl of Pembroke; he dedicated two volumes to him — St. Augustine of the City of God . . . Englished by I. H., 1610, and a second edition of Healey's Epictetus, 1616. We can almost connect him with Shakespeare, through Marlowe whom one edited and the other quoted, through the Sonnets, and through Thorpe having dedicated Epictetus his Manual to Shakespeare's intimate friend John Florio. Sir Sidney Lee speaks of Thorpe as though he thought of him as one might of some half-fed vagabond; he seems to me to have been of the tribe of Burns —'twas unsuccess not failure that

dogged his steps; he was apparently a lover of fine books; his own dedications, however flamboyant and rhetorical, are written according to the general high-flown usage of the age and prove nothing to the contrary: all antiquarians and bibliomaniacs are not writers of exquisite prose. He gives as his reason for dedicating Healey's unprinted manuscripts to Florio and to the Earl of Pembroke the fact that they had been patrons of Healey before his expatriation and death. This is exactly the reason given by the editors of the First Folio for their dedication of the plays to the Earl of Pembroke. He was a great patron of the arts. Why then should he have wished his name withheld in the instance of the Sonnets? Surely the contents of the Sonnets are reason enough; and as surely he was 'the only begetter' of them. He probably turned the manuscript over to Thorpe. It was quite natural that the friend to whom the Sonnets were addressed should hesitate in allowing his name to be publicly connected with them: they tend to prove him too surely the false friend. And yet were he a lover of literature, as he seems to have been, as he must have been to have been Shakespeare's dearest friend, conscious of the honour of Shakespeare's earlier esteem, of his love before the Dark Lady came between them, jealous for Shakespeare's fame in

later years to come, he would scarcely hope for the destruction of the manuscript; he would countenance the publication of the Sonnets and continue to play the rôle of patron. And he was a patron of Shakespeare's, not unknown to Thorpe.

XXIII

" From the dedicatory epistles addressed by Shakespeare to the Earl of Southampton in the opening pages of his two narrative poems, Venus and Adonis (1593), and Lucrece (1594), from the account given by Sir William D'Avenant, and recorded by Nicholas Rowe, of the Earl's liberal bounty to the poet, and from the language of the Sonnets," it is, according to Sir Sidney Lee, abundantly clear that the Sonnets were dedicated to my Lord of Southampton. There is no internal evidence in the Sonnets tending to prove that they were dedicated to Southampton rather than to Pembroke; the contrary indeed, one might refer to Pembroke as ' sweet boy '; Southampton appears to have been always grown-up. And the tale recounted by Nicholas Rowe in 1709 is the merest hearsay, idle gossip " that my Lord Southampton at one time gave him (Shakespeare) a thousand pounds to go through with a purchase which he

heard he had a mind to." It is not probable that Shakespeare at any time considered a purchase involving a thousand pounds more than he had cash in hand; he was an exceedingly careful trader, warned off from debt by the failure of his father. We will grant that Venus and Adonis and Lucrece were dedicated to Southampton, but in 1593 and 1594; the Sonnets date from 1598 and 1599, and there is no evidence to prove that Southampton was then Shakespeare's patron. Shakespeare did not approve of the tactics of Southampton and his friends during the late nineties. He wrote Julius Cæsar to bring home to them and to others the folly of half-baked rebellions, and portrayed in the character of Brutus the tragedy of Essex, as fine a figure as graced the Elizabethan pageant, an infinitely greater than Raleigh. But with Southampton he (Essex) went to the Tower — they had attempted to incite the rabble against the Queen. They failed miserably, more miserably even than did Brutus, Cassius and the rest. However it is to Essex (and not to Southampton) that Antony's fine words refer; he had deserved a better fate; he was one of the great noblemen of all time; while still a lad of twenty he deposed Raleigh, a man of forty, from his high place in the queen's affections,— as captain of the guard, Raleigh had to

stand at the door with drawn sword, in his brown and orange uniform, while within Essex whispered to the spinster of fifty-four things which set her heart beating. He was extremely daring, and early developed great qualities of which he had at first (perhaps) given no promise.

XXIV

"No contemporary document or tradition suggests that Shakespeare was the friend or protégé of any man of rank other than Southampton." Sir Sidney Lee is willing to believe D'Avenant on the word of Nicholas Rowe, writing a hundred years after the publication of the Sonnets, yet doubts the word of Heminges and Condell, Shakespeare's associates on the stage and his first editors, and dismisses their dedication to Pembroke — who, together with his brother, 'prosequted' both the plays, 'and their Authour living, with so much favour'— as but so much childish prattle. This is Sir Sidney Lee's method, and suits his mood. However, we can connect Shakespeare with Lord William Herbert. His father's company of players produced Shakespeare's first plays — The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of York and Titus Andronicus, and very probably

others: the first and second parts of Henry VI. Sir Sidney Lee has never had a play produced; I know I shall be everlastingly grateful to the man who produces mine; I shall consider him a patron of sorts.

Granted then that we can connect Shakepeare early in his career with the House of Pembroke. In 1593 Lord Pembroke's servants, his company of players, were in financial difficulties and soon disbanded; shortly afterwards the old Earl, broken in health, retired to the country. Here, on his family's ancient estate, young William Herbert grew to manhood. He was born April 8, 1580, and came to London early in the spring of 1598. It is to be presumed that, like all the young gentlemen of his age, he frequented the theatre. What more natural than that he should take an especial interest in Shakespeare, once his father's protégé, now the leading and most successful, most popular dramatist of the day? What more natural than that Shakespeare should be drawn to the brilliant and charming son of his old patron? An intimacy sprang up between them. The Sonnets were its natural outcome.

And Mistress Fitton is just such another as the Dark Lady bodied forth in Shakespeare's verse. She was the mistress of my Lord Herbert: a bastard son was born to them; no end of

XXV

letters were written back and forth, imploring and repudiating marriage.

But enough of argument; doubtless it wearies you. I have however an especial fondness for such subjects as are debatable. The great facts of the world are not subject to question — the sun, the moon, the stars, man's right to come and go in peace about the earth unharassed by the tyranny of emperors or of priests. — And yet, it may be, there comes a time for reaffirming the simple eternal truths of life, such a time as the present when the nations in their wrath with fury unexampled rewrite, in letters of blood and iron the principles of one common creed. There are, however, a number of things — ' just why the sea is boiling hot '— we might discuss amicably; it seems the sheerest nonsense to quibble concerning the strange conclusions of wilful Englishmen. And yet, if one is at all interested, one must be partisan. I do not envy Professor Raymond MacDonald Alden, the editor of the Variorum Edition of the Sonnets, his inability to come to any sort of conclusion concerning them. To admire the Sonnets at all is to have some curiosity concerning Mr. W. H., some interest in T. T. the pub-

lisher, some admiration for the 'dark lady of the virginals.'

How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st
Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds
With thy sweet fingers, when thou gently sway'st
The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,
Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap
To kiss the tender inward of thy hand
Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap,
At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand!

To be so tickled, they would change their state
And situation with those dancing chips,
O'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,
Making dead wood more blest than living lips.
Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,
Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.

As I have said, I am a farmer with a predilection for pigs; I cannot pass a pen of Berkshires without enquiring into their antecedents; I prefer Hampshires to most poetry; and yet, perhaps because I have given years of study to such matters I can unhesitatingly appraise their worth. Will any agree with me? Mr. Hungerford, down the river, maintains that so far as the ordinary farmer is concerned 'plain hog' is good enough; while Mr. Bliss is all for the Chester White. We each have our own notions. But is this true as regards so important a matter as the genius of Shake-

speare? Not at all; we are willing to accept the say-so of any and every pamphleteer. By personal experience we learn what we know of poultry, taking the teachings of the experts at their face value, accepting their theories *cum grano salis*. But, though we may have been associated for years on the most intimate terms with William Shakespeare, we can never make up our own minds concerning him. We always, with Professor Alden, beg the question or show no interest in the matter whatsoever. What have we, farmers and clerks and brokers, to do with the most human of the poets? I cannot in so many words state my judgment concerning him, neither can I confine my knowledge to an octavo page. He still eludes me, baffles me, thwarts my best efforts to have at him. And I think that is, in large measure, his eternal charm. What other dramatist could you study at school, read in the library, and view at the theatre with the awed interest we all of us exhibit at an even passably decent presentation of Hamlet or Lear or Othello? On the afternoon of May 10th, 1897, Mr. Bernard Shaw was present at Mr. Charrington's production of Ibsen's A Doll's House; in the evening he found Hamlet at the Olympic 'not a bad anodyne after the anguish of the Helmer household.' Throwing off the critic — thank

Heaven, it is no longer necessary to criticize Shakespeare — he indulged a 'silly boyish affection' of his for the play, which he knew nearly by heart, thereby having, as he points out, a distinct advantage over Mr. Nutcombe Gould, the producer. I myself remember Petruchio (Mr. F. R. Benson) fifteen years ago at Stratford-on-Avon in my earliest youth; I remember Mr. Otis Skinner (with Miss Ada Rehan) in the part a year or two later; then Mr. Sothern, and Mr. Eric Blind with Miss Margaret Anglin. The play is crude, slapstick farce, by no means the best of Shakespeare, and yet it has, for me at least, an interest surely equalling that of Mr. Shaw — Mr. Shaw who so maltreats my beloved Marlowe in the preface to The Admirable Bashville that I am almost ready to come to blows with him — He speaks of him elsewhere as a fool expressing his folly in blank verse; 'the moment the exhaustion of the imaginative fit deprives him of the power of raving, Marlowe becomes childish in thought, vulgar and wooden in humour, and stupid in his attempts at invention.' Mr. Shaw can forgive him nothing on account of his youth. Judged by the same standard, placed against the accumulated wisdom and wit of the ages, at twenty-nine, Ibsen is even more futile; Mr. Shaw himself a non-

entity. I am almost ready to come to blows with him, and then he paraphrases the ' mighty lines ' : —

> This is the face that burnt a thousand boats
> And banished Cashel Byron from the ring —

so pathetically that I can only pity him in his prosaic fumbling with politics and birth control while all the beauty of the world lies stretched in limitless glory before his sightless eyes. I forgive him as I forgive John Payne his

> What has become of last year's snows?

translation of Villon's perfect

> Mais où sont les neiges d'anton?

They know not what they do.

XXVI

Where are the snows of yesteryear? Where those old valiant spirits that gathered at the Mermaid, drank deep of mine host's ale, and regaled each other with famous tales of prowess in camp and court? Has Marlowe kissed his lady on the lips? Is Jonson now at peace with all the world? Has Chapman walked

with Homer about the walls of Troy? Are they leaning from the parapets of Heaven to watch us, dressed in simpler garb, the pageant faded forever from the streets, going about our less adventurous tasks? Has the smoke of battle found them where they hide? Have they thrilled to a slaughter unequalled save in the wanton horrors of their imaginative dreams? They were intrigued by every breath of scandal, delighted by the oaths of every scheming blackguard — are they laughing approval above the welter of blood that darkens Europe? They were in love with all that was adventurous, reckless, young in life and literature. I wonder are they jostling elbows with the holy prophets of whom Synge wrote: —

> If the mitred bishops seen you that time, they'd be the like of the holy prophets I'm thinking, do be straining the bars of Paradise to lay eyes on the Lady Helen of Troy, and she abroad, pacing back and forward, with a nosegay in her golden shawl.

I'll warrant they, the Persons in my Play, are more interested in her than in their golden crowns. The beauty of Helen reflected forever in the epics of Homer is an immortal splendor; a crown but a tawdry symbol of impotence menaced by every roisterer on the

street. We go about their England calling in vain to them; their inns are gone, their homes deserted, only their singing and their laughter endures throughout the years. It is a better thing to dream than to rear cities on the sands of time.

All passes. Art alone
Enduring stays to us;
The bust outlasts the throne,
The coin Tiberius.

MARY! MARY!

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

'Mould us our Shakespeare, sculptor, in the form
His comrades knew, rare Ben and all the rout
That found the taproom of the Mermaid warm
With wit and wine and fellowship, the face
Wherein the men he chummed with found a charm
To make them love him; carve for us the grace
That caught Anne Hathaway in Shottery-side,
The hand that clasped Southampton's in the days
Ere that dark dame of passion and of pride
Burned in his heart the brand of her disdain,
The eyes that wept when little Hamnet died,
The lips that learned from Marlowe's and again
Taught riper lore to Fletcher and the rest,
The presence and demeanour sovereign
At last at Stratford calm and manifest,
That rested on the seventh day and scanned
His work and knew it good, and left the quest
And like his own enchanter broke his wand.'

RICHARD HOVEY.

MARY! MARY!

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

MARY FITTON: *21 years of age, youngest child of Sir Edward Fitton, Kt., of Gawsworth in Cheshire, a maid of honour at the court of Elizabeth; of medium stature, slender and graceful, with raven black hair and glowing expressive eyes; a woman, daughter of Eve, alluring, ensnaring, tyrannical, 'athirst for admiration to such a pitch of wantonness that she cannot refrain from coquetting on every conceivable occasion; born to deal out rapture and torment with both hands, the very woman to set in vibration every chord in a poet's soul.' Shakespeare must have admired her wit and daring, her presence of mind and her capricious wayward fancy. Doubtless she was to him what Maria Fiammetta, the natural daughter of a king, was to Boccaccio. She brought into his life, the life of a poor player, a breath from a higher world. It was she who made the first advances as did Rosalind in As You Like It. Who shall doubt that Shakespeare's Sonnets, passed in manuscript from hand to hand, were not later translated into Orlando's verses and*

hung upon the trees about the forest of Arden? Who can tell how much of her personality lives on in Beatrice, Viola, and the imperial gypsy of the Nile?

EDWARD FITTON: *28 years of age, her brother; tall and gangling, his awkwardness contrasts sharply with his sister's madcap ways, as does his complexion with hers, for he is fair, with shallow blue eyes, and a blond moustache; he was created a baronet in 1617.*

FRANCIS: *43 years of age, a drawer at the Mermaid.*

HIS ASSISTANTS.

HENRY CHETTLE: *63 years of age, a publisher living at Christ Church Gate. "In Dekkar's tract, A Knight's Conjuring, dating from 1607, he figures among the poets in Elysium, where he is introduced in the following terms: 'In comes Chettle sweating and blowing, by reason of his fatness; to welcome whom, because hee was of olde acquaintance, all rose up, and fell presentlie on their knees, to drinck a health to all the lovers of Hellicon.' Elze has conjectured, possibly with justice, that in this puffing and sweating old tun of flesh, who is so whimsically greeted with mock reverence by the whole gay company, we have the very model from whom Shakespeare drew his demigod, the immortal Sir John Falstaff, beyond comparison*

the gayest, most concrete, and most entertaining figure in European comedy."— Georg Brandes,— William Shakespeare.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *35 years of age, actor and dramatist, author of Romeo and Juliet, Venus and Adonis, the Rape of Lucrece, and other poems of passion; lover to Mistress Fitton. In the diary of John Manningham, of the Middle Temple, the following entry occurs, under the date March 13, 1602: "Upon a tyme when Burbidge played Rich. 3, there was a citizen grone so farr in liking with him, that before shee went from the play shee appointed him to come that night unto her by the name of Ri: the 3. Shakespeare overhearing their conclusion went before, and was intertained ere Burbidge came. Then message being brought that Rich. the 3d was at the dore, Shakespeare caused returne to be made that William the Conquerour was before Rich. the 3. Shakespeare's name was William." And, quite in keeping, Burbage's was Richard.*

BEN JONSON: *26 years of age, poet and dramatist; strong and massive in body and mind, coarse-grained and swaggering, delighting in the fierce animal spirits of the ancients, with a minute knowledge of their life and religions.— It has become a commonplace of criticism to refer to him as 'manly,' and yet he was despite*

his airs of independence, a Tory poet and court-flatterer, one who wasted his best efforts in the creation of masques and pageants for the pedantic King James. He could, however, at times rise to the supremest heights of altruism; as witness: — Marston and Chapman (the Rival Poet of the Sonnets) having been imprisoned for certain jibes at the Scotch, which had been brought to the notice of the king, in the comedy of Eastward Ho! and it being reported that they were in danger of having their noses and ears cut off, Jonson, of his own free will, claimed his share in their responsibility and joined them in prison. And he had a mother worthy of such a son. At a supper which he gave shortly after the liberation of himself and friends, she clinked glasses with him and showed a paper containing poisonous powders which she had intended mixing with his drink, had he been sentenced to mutilation; adding that she would not have survived his death, but would have taken her portion of the draught.— And yet he has been accused of jealousy, the sheerest libel; no saner tribute to Shakespeare has ever been penned than that in Jonson's famous lines. In all the length and breadth of English drama he is second only to Shakespeare, and this is no small praise.— He was a posthumous child, son of a

clergyman whose forefathers had belonged to the gentry. Two years after his father's death his mother married a second time; Ben's step-father was a master bricklayer. Thomas Fuller describes the future great man, trowel in hand, a book in his pocket, helping in the structure of Lincoln's Inn. But he could not long endure such an occupation (at which, you may be sure, together with his conversion to Roman Catholicism, while in durance on account of a duel, his later adversaries did not fail to jeer,) so he went as a soldier to the Netherlands; where, on one occasion, under the eyes of both camps, he killed one of the enemy's soldiers in single combat. Returning to London, (he was a child of the town, as was Shakespeare of the country,) he married at the early age of nineteen; — Shakespeare was eighteen when he married Anne Hathaway. Twenty-six years later in his conversations with Drummond of Hawthornden, whom he visited while on a walking tour through England and Scotland, he described his wife as 'a shrew, yet honest' . . . He had the misfortune to survive his children.— For considerably over a century following his death, it was considered, by young poets, wits and courtiers, just cause for pride to be sealed 'of the tribe of Ben.' He himself tells us that the first speech of Sylla's ghost in the tragedy of

Cataline was written after he had parted with his friends at the tavern; he 'had drunk well that night and had brave notions.' Not without humour, as Dr. Brandes remarks, using Ben's favourite word, is the glimpse we catch of him in France while travelling as tutor with Sir Walter Raleigh's son,— Sir Walter was at the time, imprisoned in the Tower awaiting execution. It was young Raleigh's pleasure to get his venerable companion drunk beyond the powers of utterance, and then wheel him in a barrow about the streets of Paris, and so exhibit him to the astonished and delighted citizens.

JOHN FLETCHER: *20 years of age, son of the queen's chaplain, the Bishop of London; born in Rye in Sussex, where at the time, his father was vicar. 'In an age of song, when every playwright could on occasion produce a lyric or two of remarkable grace and loveliness, songs in every style, and always right, always beautiful, seemed to flow by nature from Fletcher's pen.' It was due as much to his genius as to the blindness of the critics that for almost a century after the Restoration he (and his collaborator Beaumont) were the most popular of Elizabethen dramatists.*

JOHN LYLY: *46 years of age, university graduate, poet and dramatist. The best of his work was published before 1592. He was the*

author of Euphues or the Anatomy of Wit, (1578), the most influential and popular book in England before the coming of Marlowe. His vogue, however, was rapidly declining, and, so far as is known, he died poor and neglected. Elizabeth, who professed to admire his work, did nothing for him, though he lived for years on the hope of becoming master of the revels at court. He was married, the father of two sons and a daughter.

MICHAEL DRAYTON: *36 years of age, stolid and plodding, already regarded as a plagiarist in 1598, as appears from certain lines of Edward Guilpin's in his Skialetheia. The influence of Shakespeare is noticeable in the 1599 edition of Drayton's Idea; and this is of some importance as proving the Sonnets to have been written before that date, though they were not published until 1609. He was born in Hartshull in Warwickshire, and lies buried in Westminster Abbey.*

JOHN FLORIO: *47 years of age, a lexicographer and translator, of Tuscan origin, of middle stature, swarthy and strutting. He had been a teacher of French and Italian at Oxford University. It has been suggested that he was satirised by Shakespeare in the character of Holofernes, the pompous pedant, in Love's Labour's Lost. He is mentioned by Wood, in*

Athenæ Oxoniensis, as a very useful man in his profession, zealous for his religion, and deeply attached to England. His last, and perhaps greatest work was a translation of Montaigne's Essays, published in folio in 1603, and dedicated to the queen. Special interest attaches to this work from the circumstance that of the several copies of the first edition in the British Museum Library, one bears the autograph of Shakespeare and another that of Ben Jonson.— The lines I give him to read appeared anonymously about 1600; it is doubtful if he be the author of them, but, though he wrote quite fluently in verse, I could find nothing of his so suitable to my purpose, and, this once, have acted arbitrarily.

WILLIAM KEMP: *28 years of age, a jig dancer. "The Rev. W. A. Harrison called attention to evidence which brings Mrs. Fitton into connection with a member of Shakespeare's company, that is, the Lord Chamberlain's company, leaving it easily to be inferred that she must have been acquainted with the members of the company, and especially with such as were more prominent. In 1600 William Kemp, the clown of the company, dedicated his 'Nine Daies Wonder' to 'Mistress Anne Fitton, Mayde of Honour to most sacred Mayde, Royal Queene Elizabeth.' The book gives an ac-*

count of a journey which Kemp had performed, morris-dancing from London to Norwich. As Dyce maintained, when he edited Kemp's book for the Camden Society, Mrs. Fitton's Christion name was given erroneously as 'Anne.' The error may have originated from Kemp not being well acquainted with Mistress Fitton's Christian name. Perhaps, however, it is more probable that he wrote 'Marie,' a name which might so be written as to be easily mistaken for 'Anne.' But, however this may be, Elizabeth certainly had no maid of honour Anne Fitton in 1599 or 1600. It follows that the person intended by Kemp was Mistress Mary Fitton; and a good deal of light is thus thrown on her character. That one of the Queen's maids of honour should be chosen as the patroness of a publication of so comparatively frivolous a character as this of Kemp's might well seem surprising. But facts already adduced make this seem much less wonderful."— Thomas Tyler, Shakespeare's Sonnets.— Among the facts already adduced might be noted the following: 'Mary Fitton, maid of honour, had one bastard by Wm. E. of Pembroke, & two bastards by Sir Richard Leveson, Kt.'— Kemp from the beginning played all the chief low-comedy parts in Shakespeare's dramas — Peter and Balthasar in Romeo and Juliet, Shallow in Henry

IV, Lancelot in the Merchant of Venice, Dogberry in Much Ado About Nothing, Touchstone in As You Like It. He was, perhaps the most popular member of the company; but in 1602 he deserted and went over to Henslowe. His loss was keenly felt; Shakespeare sent the following shaft after him from the lips of Hamlet:—

And let those who play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them, for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too; though, in the meantime, some necessary question of the play be then to be considered: that's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it.

His description of the 'Nine Daies Wonder,' with its arrogant dedication, shows how conceited Kemp must have been; and Hamlet shows us how he must have annoyed Shakespeare with his 'gags' and interpolations. This reproof, however, is couched in quite general terms; certain far sharper criticisms, contained in the edition of 1603, were expunged when the wanderer returned to the company.

SIR WALTER RALEIGH: *47 years of age, the very type of the vigourous versatility of the Elizabethan period — soldier, seaman, statesman, poet, historian, philosopher, courtier*

and wit; and always he played his part with consummate art and self-assurance. He discovered the Guianas, and established the first British colony in North America, Virginia, named by him in compliment to the Queen. He introduced potatoes into Ireland and tobacco into England,— tobacco had, however, been cultivated for years in Portugal and was known in France at the court of Queen Catharine de Medici. He fought in the Netherlands, in Ireland, in Spain, in Africa, and here and there about the seas; it was his advice (not to board the Spanish Galleons) that made possible Drake's victory over the Armada. — And Spenser styled him 'the summer's nightingale.' Yet he was altogether of the world worldly; a pirate, an opportunist, almost the murderer of his young rival Essex; and, after Essex's execution, he was the best hated man in England, unpopular with the people, hissed and hooted whenever he appeared upon the streets. Heroism is simple, homespun, almost selfless; Raleigh was ever motivated, acquiring wealth or power. I know he pleaded for Udell, but there is for me but one great act in his life: when he married and forfeited the Queen's favour, the Queen who could brook no rival. Raleigh had seduced Elizabeth Throckmorton, a maid of honour; reckless of consequences, he made

her his wife,— and, in consequence, went to the Tower for the first time.— His death, the speech from the scaffold — he seems almost to have atoned for his life, if that were possible.

WILLIAM HERBERT: *19 years of age, eldest son of the Earl of Pembroke, and Shakespeare's best beloved. Very probably the handsomest and best liked young man in the England of his day.*

MARY! MARY!

November, 1599. . . . The taproom of the Mermaid Tavern in Cheapside. Here the Syren, a literary club founded by Sir Walter Raleigh, held its meetings.

About seven or seven-thirty in the evening.

In the back a grilled window through which one may see the lights in the houses opposite and an occasional party passing with lanterns, or the night-watch on his rounds. To the right of the window, a door opening onto the street. Before the window, a long wooden bench and a table running lengthwise with the wall. To right and left, other such tables and benches. But there is an open space in the centre of the room, reserved for the speaker having the floor. In the far corner to the left, a door leading into the rest of the house. The ceilings are raftered and plastered; the walls are panelled and — 'twas good advice; mine host of the Mermaid doubtless followed it — 'for thy walls, a pretty slight drollery, or the story of the prodigal, or the German hunting in water-work, is worth a thousand of these bed-hangings and these fly-bitten tapestries.'

The door from the street opens, and MARY, *disguised as a young gentleman of the court, enters accompanied by her brother* EDWARD.

MARY: [*looking curiously about the room*]. So this is where they hold their meetings, full of fine talk, art and love and war?

EDWARD: Yes. . . . O' Wednesdays.

MARY: A strange place. Who would think to look for my Will o' the Wisp in a taproom?

EDWARD: And why not? Think you he is always sighing, or wracking his poor brain for rhymes? A man must laugh, or turn Papist.

MARY: He told me he was going to read a sonnet here to-night, praising my eyes.

EDWARD: The first?

MARY: No, not the first. And yet he would not let me see it. The club must pass upon it. If they do not like it, then he thinks it unworthy of me, and so destroys it.

EDWARD: He should destroy them all. I have no patience with these ballad-mongers, littering the world with their rhymes.

MARY: Hush! for I am all a-tiptoe to hear his verses read, almost mad with waiting.

EDWARD: Say rather, mad to come on such an errand. If you were seen, the Queen —

MARY: [*putting her hand over his mouth*],

Hush! there's no danger. But, oh, I'm glad you're with me.

EDWARD: Certes, for you could not venture out alone, in such a guise.

MARY: Pray, your reason, sir? I would have come alone — at least, I think I would have. You never heard him read his verses.

EDWARD: Nor do I care to. I prefer Chapman or Henslowe's comedies.

MARY: Blasphemous Ned! And I — (ah me!) I have so longed to watch him when he did not know that I was nigh, when he was just himself and not the lover, not the poet, not the actor, just plain Will Shakespeare of Stratford Town.

EDWARD: Is he ever anything else?

MARY: His heart is always prostrate, kneeling to me: —

> In the old age black was not counted fair,
> Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
> But now is black beauty's successive heir.

EDWARD: I had as leave hear a dog bay the moon.

MARY: And yet you steal his verses. I have noticed, when he thought me busy with other things and unconscious of his presence, how he gazed upon me with an awed wonder in his eyes. Heigh-ho, its different when a poet

loves; he woos with such a myriad of gorgeous words; he lifts the ordinary passions — and I suppose they are ordinary — out of the commonplace and gives to every phrase a new significance. The sun, the moon, the stars — 'Diana's waiting women' — grown familiar with the years, appear to put on a new dress and trip across the heavens like fairies in a masque.

EDWARD: None can usurp his place?

MARY: Not to-day, not to-morrow.

EDWARD: Why, then, do you coquette so wantonly?

MARY: Michievous me! He is so quaint when he is jealous.

EDWARD: His love vies with his patience. What if your madness wearied him?

MARY: Not to-day — Listen: —

> Tell me thou lov'st elsewhere; but in my sight,
> Dear heart, forbear to glance thine eyes aside:
> What need'st thou wound with cunning, when thy might
> Is more than my o'er-press'd defence can bide?

[*She has slid into a place at the table, way forward on the left.*] Call the drawer, Ned; I would some cherry wine.

EDWARD [*calling*]: Francis!

FRANCIS [*within*]: Anon, sir, anon.

EDWARD: Come hither, sirrah.

[*Enter Francis*]

FRANCIS: Coming, sir. You are welcome, sir.

EDWARD [*seating himself on the bench beside Mary*]: The young gentleman here desires a glass of cherry-wine; and for myself a cup of canary with sugar in it.

FRANCIS: Aye, sir. On the instant, sir. [*He starts away*]:

MARY [*recalling him*]: Francis, knowest thou one Will Shakespeare?

FRANCIS: Aye, sir; that I do, sir.

MARY: He wears my Lord Chamberlain's livery?

FRANCIS: Aye, sir.

MARY: I prithee, of what humour is he?

FRANCIS: Of a very pleasant humour, an' it please you, sir.

MARY: Hast known him long?

[*Their dialogue is interrupted by the entrance from the street of* CHETTLE, SHAKESPEARE, JONSON, FLETCHER, LYLY, DRAYTON, FLORIO, KEMP, *and several others, poets and players. They are all chatting and laughing, jostling each other in high spirits.*]

FRANCIS: Let me see; about Michaelmas next it will be —

SHAKESPEARE [*to* CHETTLE]: And his eloquence be other than 'Anon, sir,'—

FRANCIS [*continuing, to* MARY *and* EDWARD]: In sooth, sir, as I reckon it, twelve years.

SHAKESPEARE [*continuing*]: Or 'as true as day,' or 'as God shall mend me,' and such like parrot phrases, may'st thou be strung up by the heels like a Yorkshire boar at the butcher's.

CHETTLE: God a' mercy! so should I be hanged indeed.

JONSON: No man can escape his fate.

CHETTLE: An' I be not better than the best of you, I am as withered as a dried prune.

MARY [*to* FRANCIS]: Is that not Will Shakespeare there with the fat old man?

[CHETTLE *has seated himself at a table in the centre of the room, with* SHAKESPEARE *on his left and* JONSON *on his right. The others take places here and there at the other tables.* FRANCIS *turns and examines the new arrivals.*]

CHETTLE: Francis!

FRANCIS: Anon, sir.

MARY: My question, Francis. Can'st not answer? Do'st not know him?

FRANCIS: As I live, sir.

CHETTLE [*in a voice of thunder*]: Fran-

cis, you fleshless monstrosity, you fiddle-bow, you starvelling logger-head, you —

FRANCIS: Anon, sir.

CHETTLE: Oh, for breath to speak in just comparisons!

FRANCIS: Anon, sir; coming, sir. [*He goes towards* CHETTLE'S *table.*]

SHAKESPEARE [*to* FRANCIS]: So? I had thought to hear thee answer, 'Score three pints of bastard and brew a pottle of ale, simple of itself.'

CHETTLE: As I live by my wits, rare words, a brave world!

FRANCIS: Anon, sir.

CHETTLE: I'll be sworn I make as good use of liquor as many a man doth of a prayer book; but I'll no hen fruit in my brewage, nor lime either.

EDWARD: Francis.

CHETTLE: Away, you rogue. Look to the guests.

FRANCIS [*over his shoulder as he hurries out*]: Anon, sir.

CHETTLE: That ever this fellow should be so well-languaged and yet an under-skinker in Cheapside, passeth my comprehension.

JONSON: He is as witty as a serving man in Menander.

CHETTLE: And as valiant as Errcles, or

I'm a comfit-maker's wife. [*The door opens; and* RALEIGH *and* HERBERT *enter from the street.*]

CHETTLE [*to* SHAKESPEARE]: Here comes Sir Walter and your young friend, Herbert.

MARY [*to her brother*]: Who is that beautiful young man?

EDWARD: The Earl of Pembroke's son; handsome young devil.

MARY [*to herself*]: Oh, I'm so glad I came.

SHAKESPEARE [*rising and motioning* HERBERT *to a place beside him*]. Welcome, friend. Sir Walter, your servant. [*The company rises, while the newcomers seat themselves.*]

RALEIGH [*barely nodding his head*]: Friends.

HERBERT [*with a wave of the hand*]: Gentlemen.

ALL: Your servants.

[*The company resume their former places.* FRANCIS *and his assistants move here and there serving ale, honey-drink, apple-drink, and various kinds of wine. Never before or since has England enjoyed so many different kinds of beverages; there were fifty-six varieties of French wine in use and thirty-six of Spanish and Italian, to say nothing of the many home-made, and all*

sorts of strong and small beer. RALEIGH JONSON, CHETTLE, FLORIO *and* EDWARD FITTON *smoke.*]

CHETTLE [*above the buzz of talk*]: By the Lord, lads, shall we to business?

CHORUS OF VOICES: Aye, marry. Order! Order!

RALEIGH: Concerning Marlowe, was it not?

DRAYTON: You mistake, sir; we were to bring verses of our own and read them here.

LYLY: Such as might vie with Marlowe's lines to Helen, not in expression only, but in conception, not in metre, but in beauty.

CHETTLE: 'Tis impossible.

SHAKESPEARE: What! so swift to appraise that of which thou art still in ignorance?

CHETTLE: 'Tis impossible. Dost thou hear me, Will? When any man surpasses this same Kit Marlowe, may a cup of sack be my poison.

SHAKESPEARE: How now, my sweet creature of bombast, sayest thou I cannot?

CHETTLE: I say, thou canst not? I'll see thee damned ere I say thou canst not.

SHAKESPEARE: Marry, then?

CHETTLE: But an thou dost, I am a brewer's horse or a Jew, an Ebrew Jew.

DRAYTON [*to* CHETTLE]: You were to read Marlowe's lines, Hal.

CHETTLE: I cannot.

LYLY: Your reason, sir? We who have our own verses cannot read his.

CHETTLE: Then must Francis read them, for what with halloing and roaring of answers in church, I have no more voice than a sparrow.

SHAKESPEARE: Thou hast not seen the inside of a church since thy namesake was king.

CHETTLE: Hal? 'Tis a royal name.

JONSON: Of late fallen into disuse.

CHETTLE: Yet was I as virtuously given as a man need be; drank little and gave such sarcanet surety for my oaths as might a Sunday-citizen.

SHAKESPEARE: Not within the memory of any here present.

CHETTLE: Do thou amend thy plays, and I'll amend my life.

HERBERT [*who has been watching* MARY]: Let the young gentleman yonder read Marlowe's lines and I'll warrant you none shall surpass their beauty.

CHETTLE [*observing* MARY, *who is somewhat taken aback by being thus suddenly drawn into their discussion*]: He hath just such a fire in his eye as burned in Kit's. By the Lord, I could have believed him his younger brother. Come lad; you shall honour us.

MARY: I fear I am untutored in these matters.

CHETTLE: Matters or no matters, it matters not. I will not be gainsaid.

HERBERT [*rising, taking a manuscript copy of the ever famous lines, and going over and putting it into* MARY'S *hand*]: Have no fear.

MARY: Only reluctance to mar with faulty elocution the faultless rythm of another's verse.

HERBERT [*leading her gently into the open space before* CHETTLE'S *table*]: The lines are beautiful; had I not fixed my eyes upon your face and heard the music of your voice, I might have said no man could add to their great store of loveliness, but now — Have no fear.

MARY: You are over-kind.

HERBERT [*bowing*]: I am your servant, sir. [*He goes back to his place at the table.*]

CHETTLE: Silence, boys; gallants all, silence. [*To* MARY]. Come, lad, come.

MARY [*first looking helplessly about the room, takes up the manuscript and reads*]:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burned the topless towers of Ilium? —
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss! —
Her lips suck forth my soul; see where it flies! —
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.

I will be Paris, and for love of thee,
Instead of Troy, shall Wittenberg be sacked,
And I will combat with weak Menelaus,
And wear thy colours on my plumed crest;
Yes, I will wound Achilles in the heel,
And then return to Helen for a kiss.
Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars;
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter
When he appeared to hapless Semele;
More lovely than the monarch of the sky
In wanton Arethusa's azured arms;
And none but thou shall be my paramour!

[*The manuscript slides from her hands to the floor.*]

CHETTLE: Bravo! bravo! [*General applause; cries of "Well read."*]

CHETTLE: Excellent well read.

[MARY *hesitates a moment, and then runs back, blushing the least bit, to her place beside her brother.*]

HERBERT [*rising*]: Sir, and I were a maid and wooed with such words in such a voice, I would yield me immediate to your embrace.

SHAKESPEARE [*to* MARY]: Sir, and you were a maid, I well might sue in some such words for such another kiss as Helen's from your lips.

MARY: I fear you flatter me.

HERBERT: No, on my honour, I speak truth.

CHETTLE: 'Twas excellent well read.

LYLY: Balanced sentence for sentence, as harmonious as the plash of waves along the beach.

CHETTLE: How now, you rhymers, can do as well?

DRAYTON: Art improves with age; year by year we learn more from the ancients and from nature, and in our larger knowledge of life may well improve upon their handiwork.

CHETTLE: No, by'r Lady, no. There has but one lover lived in our time; improve upon the ancients if you will.

JONSON: Say rather if you can.

CHETTLE: I care not. But this same Marlowe — I defy you. A rogue and a villain, but a most sweet spoken youth, who could concoct you a proper lament upon a faithless mistress as lightly as he had within the hour debauched her.

DRAYTON: For my part, I care not for such adventurers.

FLORIO: Nor I. Love should be civilised, not barbarous.

CHETTLE: Adventurers, say you? I defy adventurers! A plague on such damnable ex-

pressions. 'Twas a most excellent good word before it became ill-sorted, now is it as odious as the word 'occupy.' Are we not all adventurers, voyaging hither and thither, we know not where, about the seas of life in rotten leaky old tubs?

SHAKESPEARE: Not angry, Hal?

CHETTLE: If his conceit were not as thick as Tewksbury mustard, he had not used such a word. I would rather than forty capons, Kit were here to answer him. A plague on all cowards! Is there no virtue extant?

SHAKESPEARE: Come, you pitiful-hearted Titan, what's this you mutter?

CHETTLE: It goes hard against my stomach that one who has not so much as clapped eye upon this same Kit of Canterbury — God rest his soul! — should speak of him as I might of Bob Greene.

JONSON: Not that my judgment is of years —

CHETTLE [*interrupting*]: My liver cries out against all blasphemers of true worth. [*To a drawer*]. Boy, a cup of sack.

JONSON [*soberly.* SHAKESPEARE *produced his first play after it had been refused by* HENSLOWE]: And yet, methinks, our Will here doth far outshine Greene or Kyd or Marlowe's mighty line.

CHETTLE [*grudgingly; he loves* WILL SHAKESPEARE *as* FALSTAFF *loved the* PRINCE]: And any could, 'twould be this same mad mountebank Will; a plague on him.

SHAKESPEARE: What, woulds't revile me?

CHETTLE: Aye, and to thy face. I speak ill of no man behind his back.

SHAKESPEARE: Thou hast grown so fat-witted with drinking old sack and unbuttoning thee after supper, that thou hast forgotten what is due the present company. How canst thou exalt one above the rest?

CHETTLE: Indeed thou comest near me now, Will; I am overgiven to praising my fellows.

SHAKESPEARE: What a devil hast thou to do with the paying of compliments?

CHETTLE: By'r Lady, not so much as my hostess of the tavern when she has borne and borne, and been fubbed off from this day to that until those of thy complexion have become infinities upon her score.

SHAKESPEARE: Did I ever call for thee to pay?

CHETTLE: No, I'll give thee thy due there.

SHAKESPEARE: Then peace, woolsack, and listen to the poets.

CHETTLE: Aye, marry, I will. I must make some show of penance, while I have the

strength left. It may be too late when thou hast —

SHAKESPEARE: A truce, Hal.

JONSON: And listen to Drayton.

CHETTLE: Aye, St. Michael. [*To* DRAYTON.] We wait on you, sir.

DRAYTON: Am I the first?

JONSON: Always.

DRAYTON [*coming forward to a place before* CHETTLE'S *table*]: As you will. [*He reads.*]

How many paltry, foolish, painted things,
That now in coaches trouble every street,
Shall be forgotten, whom no poet sings,
Ere they be well wrapped in their winding-sheet;
Where I to thee eternity shall give,
When nothing else remaineth of these days,
And queens hereafter shall be glad to live
Upon the alms of my superfluous praise;
Virgins and matrons reading these my rhymes,
Shall be so much delighted with thy story,
That they shall grieve they lived not in these times,
To have seen thee, their sex's only glory;
So shalt thou fly above the vulgar throng,
Still to survive in my immortal song.

[*General applause, cries of bravo, etc.* DRAYTON *bows and goes back to his seat.*]

CHETTLE [*to* SHAKESPEARE]: By the Lord, 'tis himself he praises, not the lady.

RALEIGH: 'Tis the way with poets.

JONSON: With all men, sir.

HERBERT: Certainly with those at court.

SHAKESPEARE: And why not? Helen herself was inarticulate; she shares blind Homer's immortality as in a portrait the sitter wears a ring and both are painted on the canvas. When the ring is lost, the sitter dust, the portrait still remains to tell of both of them; and so a song endures singing forever of Phyllida and Corydon who wooed her with his melodies. And yet I sometimes think that you and I will be forgotten with all the other singers who are mute in hushed oblivion. What profit to say your love was fair? Was ever love other than fair? What can you add to Marlowe's verse? Better, methinks, to say She was not lovelier than Helen; no armies fought long battles for her sake, and yet I who knew her well loved her — she was not fair but amoureuse.

MARY [*to her brother*]: Is he not 'amoureux?'

EDWARD: To me, words; what of it? He is a word-monger.

MARY: A lord of language.

RALEIGH: Shall we hear Lyly?

CHETTLE: Aye, marry. You, John, come forth.

LYLY [*reciting his verses as he comes forward from his seat*]:

Cupid and my Campaspe played
At cards for kisses: Cupid paid.
He stakes his quiver, bows and arrows,
His mother's doves and team of sparrows;
Loses them too; then down he throws
The coral of his lips, the rose
Growing on's cheek, but none knows how;
With these the crystal of his brow,
And then the dimple of his chin —
All these did my Campaspe win.
And last he set her both his eyes.—
She won and blind did Cupid rise.—
O Love, has she done this to thee?
What shall, alas, become of me?

[*General applause;* LYLY *bows low and retires to his seat.*]

CHETTLE [*to* FLETCHER]: And you, Jack?

FLETCHER: Could not love one who so maltreats the god of love.

CHETTLE: How now, lad?

FLETCHER: Talk not to me of mistresses; her tongue was ever telling lie after lie. Never again shall love, deluding love, find dwelling in my heart. That place that does contain my books, the best companions, is to me a glorious court, where hourly I may converse with the old sages and philosophers. There let me rest. Why I could sleep while all the maids in London cried: 'For pity, stay with us and

dally in the shade. See, lusty Spring is here, yellow and gaudy blue, daintily blushing, enticing men to joy in amourous sport and play about the meade.' Away with such delights!

CHETTLE: By the Lord, thou sayest true, lad; but was not Joan in Sussex a most sweet wench?

FLETCHER: What a pox have I to do with Joan in Sussex? See here, last night I wrote in praise of melancholy.

CHETTLE: Sweet wag, and not yet a hair upon thy chin.

FLETCHER: I have a beard coming.

CHETTLE: With the new year. [*To the company at large*]: But shall he read his verses?

CHORUS OF VOICES: Aye, marry, let him read them.

CHETTLE: Like a lass that mimics her father's deep-voiced chidings. Come then, prithee, Jacques, read. I am in a mood to hear your rhymes. I feel myself as melancholy as a lover's lute or the drone of a Lincolnshire bagpipe.

FLETCHER [*reads*]:

Hence, all you vain delights,
As short as are the nights

Wherein you spend your folly;
There's naught in this life sweet,
If man were wise to see't,
But only melancholy!
Welcome, folded arms and fixèd eyes,
A sigh that piercing mortifies,
A look that's fastened to the ground,
A tongue chained up, without a sound!
Fountain-heads and pathless groves,
Places which pale passion loves!
Moonlight walks, when all the fowls
Are warmly housed, save bats and owls!
A midnight bell, a parting groan!
These are the sounds we feed upon;
Then stretch our bones in a still gloomy valley;
Nothing's so dainty sweet as lovely melancholy.

JONSON: O woe! O woe is me! Keep time, O plashing fountain, with my tears; languish unsolaced in a desert Arcady; grief falls in showers about my ears like melting snow upon some craggy hill.

MARY [*aside to her brother*]: I find his verses very pretty.

HERBERT [*to* FLETCHER]: Exquisite; my compliments, sir.

CHETTLE: A truce to weeping. 'Tis no more in keeping with our design than crêpe at a butcher's. Commend the lad; he hath done nobly.

CHORUS OF VOICES: Nobly! excellently well, etc.

SHAKESPEARE [*quoting himself*]:

> And so, sigh no mo',
> But be you blithe and bonny,
> Converting all your sounds of woe
> Into Hey nonny, nonny.

CHETTLE: Let us be merry. [*To the drawer.*] A cup of sack, boy.

JONSON: And another.

CHETTLE: Who now? You, Florio; come, a truce to tears.

FLORIO [*reads*]:

> My love in her attire doth show her wit,
> It doth so well become her;
> For every season she hath dressings fit,
> For winter, spring, and summer.
> No beauty she doth miss
> When all her robes are on;
> But Beauty's self she is
> When all her robes are gone.

[*General applause. Cries of "Well said," etc.*]

JONSON: And hast thou seen her so, John? Fie, for shame.

SHAKESPEARE: Nay, but are there any here can swear he speaks the truth?

CHETTLE: Marry, and there be not, 'tis a most properly villainous company, and I'd as leave consort with babes unwitting of the world as drink with e'er a one of you.

SHAKESPEARE: Prithee, most noble Paris, upon what hill-top has she appeared to you for judgment of her charms? An' you judge of our verses as lightly as of our vices, we are all condemned for Puritans and had as leave sing psalms as praise of Amorette.

CHETTLE: Then read; thou art not above suspicion.

SHAKESPEARE: Was Cæsar's wife?

CHETTLE [*confidentially*]: I have heard say she was most lewdly given.

JONSON: An' you heard that, 'twas not of Calpurnia.

CHETTLE: Had he more than one wife?

JONSON: Aye, marry, four.

SHAKESPEARE: And as many loves as thou hast fondly dreamed of in the night.

CHETTLE: Then was he indeed favoured among men. A plague of sighing and grief! I have pursued women since my birth, and been successful not above a score of times.

SHAKESPEARE: Why hast thou never married?

CHETTLE: What, with such friends as I am cursed withal? Then had you been the spoil

of me. No, I will be procurer for ne'er a man in Christendom, not I. Read your verses.

SHAKESPEARE: I cannot; I have destroyed them.

CHETTLE: What? Jest not with me. An' you do —

SHAKESPEARE [*interrupting*]: I would not jest, Hal, when thou art serious.

CHETTLE: Then prithee, read.

SHAKESPEARE: How can I read? These others have stolen all my metaphors, pillaged the heavens for similes, ransacked the earth for secret beauties such as might bear comparison with the fair ladies of their love; lured fairy phrases from out the mass of commonplace that litters this old world, and made the oldest fables point a new moral, all, all, in service of Dan Cupid. And yet you bid me read. My verses could be at best but a poor repetition of all that they have said. No I'll not read. My mistress is too fair for plagiaristic praise. What others say of Beatrice, Heloise and Annabelle could never pass for laud of her.

JONSON: Then you will not read? 'Tis well. We have others of your rhymings here. They shall be entered for the prize.

SHAKESPEARE: No, I pray you. I will write more. [*He gets up and goes toward a table in the rear of the room near the door.*]

CHETTLE: Marry do; and it be not better than the best of Ovid —

SHAKESPEARE [*interrupting*]: Hast read Ovid, Hal? O learned Judge!

CHETTLE: Zounds; an' you trifle with me —

SHAKESPEARE [*again interrupting*]: O upright Judge!

JONSON: Peace, Will; you anger him.

SHAKESPEARE: No abuse, Hal.

CHETTLE: What! no abuse to taunt me with catch phrases from thy most vile smelling theatre?

SHAKESPEARE: Hal, o' my honour, no abuse.

CHETTLE: A plague on all plagiarists! A man that would parody himself —

HERBERT: I prithee peace.

CHETTLE: He hath not so much grace as would serve to be prologue to a dish of tripe.

SHAKESPEARE: O noble Judge!

JONSON: Peace, Will.

[SHAKESPEARE *calls for pen and paper.*]

CHETTLE: There lives not above four good men unhanged in England, God help the while. [*In a voice of thunder.*] Boy, bring me a cup of sack!

SHAKESPEARE: Not angry, Hal?

CHETTLE: That's past praying for.

JONSON: Cease, Will.

CHETTLE: Come, Ben, cheerily. Let's have it.

[SHAKESPEARE *sets to writing.*]

JONSON [*reading*]:

Have you seen but a bright lily grow
Before rude hands have touched it?
Have you marked but the fall o' the snow
Before the soil hath smutched it?
Have you felt the wool of the beaver,
Or the swan's down ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the brier?
Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she.

SHAKESPEARE: Good, Master Ben; it makes music on which a myriad loves might feed.

HERBERT: O rare Ben Jonson!

CHETTLE: By the Lord I had not done better myself.

CHORUS: Honest Ben! well said! etc.

MARY [*to her brother*]: 'Twas very pretty, but my Sweet William — We have but to wait.

CHETTLE: And now, Sir Walter.

RALEIGH: 'Tis but a trifle.

JONSON: And like gold outweighs a mass of dross.

RALEIGH: My love admits no rival, and so perforce I have no love.

HERBERT: No love, sir?

RALEIGH: At present none.

MARY [*as though to herself*]: 'Tis past believing.

RALEIGH [*continuing*]: Save her most gracious Majesty, the Queen.

CHETTLE [*rising and proffering a toast*]: The Queen!

ALL [*rising and lifting their cups*]: The Queen, God bless her!

MARY [*as the company resume their seats, aside to her brother*]: And he cares no more for her than I do.

RALEIGH: I could not read verses in praise of her; how should she vie here with these others — Diana who so far outshines all women yet created.

MARY [*the cat, to her brother*]: And she is as ugly as the witch of Endor.

RALEIGH: But I have heard your other poets sing, and so —

JONSON: Let us hear what you have to say to them, sir.

RALEIGH [*reading*]:

Shall I like a hermit dwell,
On a rock, or in a cell
Calling home the smallest part
That is missing of my heart,
To bestow it where I may
Meet a rival every day?
If she undervalue me,
What care I how fair she be?

MARY [*as though to herself*]: If he undervalue me, what care I how rich he be?

RALEIGH [*overhearing her*]: Sir, you spoke?

MARY [*confused*]: Your pardon; I was repeating to myself a snatch of song heard long ago. Your pardon.

RALEIGH [*with a slight bow to her continues*]:

Were her hands as rich a prize
As her hairs, or precious eyes,
If she lay them out to take
Kisses, for good manners' sake;
And let every lover skip
From her hand unto her lip;
If she seem not chaste to me,
What care I how chaste she be.

MARY [*aside to her brother*]: If she let him know of the others, I have no pity for her.

RALEIGH:

No, she must be perfect snow,
In effect as well as show;
Warming, but as snowballs do,
Not like fire, by burning too;
But when she by change hath got
To her heart a second lot,
Then if others share with me,
Farewell her, whate'er she be!

CHETTLE: Excellent.

SHAKESPEARE: Very bravely said.

CHORUS: So say I; Bravo, etc.

CHETTLE: I could bid a thousand loves good-bye, an' I thought I should find another on the morrow.

SHAKESPEARE: A very Solomon for wisdom, and for women. Fie, Hal, for shame. You are like a candle the better part burnt out.

CHETTLE: I am like a lamp replenished with oil. Come, boy, a cup of sack. My voice is as good as any in London.

JONSON: And yet you cannot read Marlowe.

CHETTLE: I can swear an oath with ere a man living; an' I do not, I am a shotten herring. Loving is but so much blasphemy, vows plighted and broken with a twist of the tongue. Tell me not of love.

SHAKESPEARE: No man shall so presumptuous be.

CHETTLE: Let me hear your verses.

MARY: Aye, let us hear Will Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE [*rising and bowing to* MARY]: Your servant, gentle stranger.

CHETTLE: A truce for your fine manners; they are not in keeping with your plays.

SHAKESPEARE: How so?

CHETTLE: For you have peopled the stage with the greatest number of rogues and villains, cutthroats and thiefs, harlots, drunkards and cowards in history. Are these fine manners?

SHAKESPEARE: Are yours?

CHETTLE: And they be not, he was a fool that taught them to me.

SHAKESPEARE [*coming forward*]: Speak not ill of the dead.

CHETTLE: There are as many blackguards dead as living.

SHAKESPEARE: Let them rest in peace. If their judges here were all as virtuous as thou art, it went hard with them in life: they have suffered enough.

CHETTLE: Thou hast a most damnable wit, and could indeed corrupt a saint. Thou hast done me much harm, Will, God forgive thee for it.

SHAKESPEARE: And thou wast not damned ere I met thee, 'twas through some oversight.

CHETTLE: I knew nothing; and now, if a man speaks truly, am I little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life.

SHAKESPEARE: 'Tis near thy time. There is not a white hair on thy face but should have its effect upon thy character.

CHETTLE: And, by the Lord, I will give it over.

SHAKESPEARE: Do.

CHETTLE: I would I were a weaver; I could sing hymns or anything.

SHAKESPEARE: I see a good amendment of life in thee, Hal.

CHETTLE: I would to God I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought.

SHAKESPEARE: What hast thou to offer in exchange?

CHETTLE: An' I do not get one, thou hast been there before me and stolen the lot. But, prithee, read: I would steep myself in fantasy.

SHAKESPEARE: Hast thou no music in thy soul?

CHETTLE: Marry, thou knowest; yet it grows stale with repetition. Refresh me with thy wood notes wild.

SHAKESPEARE: What wouldst thou, Hal?

CHETTLE: Marry, nothing. I like thy fan-

cies; they ascend me into the brain, drive out all the foolish and dull vapours which environ it, and fill my heart with nimble and delectable shapes. Woo me with thy verses.

MARY [*to her brother*]: Oh listen. I could almost swoon to the delicious music of his voice.

EDWARD [*to* MARY; *he begins to weary of all poetry and of all lovers*]: Will you too grow lyrical?

SHAKESPEARE [*to* CHETTLE]: Art listening, Hal?

CHETTLE: As intent as a cat at a rat hole.

MARY [*to* EDWARD]: Hush! When he speaks my praise, I am in love — [*She does not finish her sentence.*]

SHAKESPEARE [*reading*]:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,—

CHETTLE [*interrupting*]: How so?

SHAKESPEARE [*to* CHETTLE]: They are black. [*He resumes his reading.*]

Coral is far more red than her lips red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.

MARY [*it is scarce the sort of sonnet she had expected from her lover to herself*]: Can it be that I hear aright?

SHAKESPEARE [*reading*]:

I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks; —

MARY [*bitterly disappointed, to herself*]: For shame, so to abuse me.

SHAKESPEARE [*reading; he little guesses the effect of his verses on the lady to whom they are indirectly addressed*]:

And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.

MARY [*she is still young; never before has she been so hurt; as though to herself*]: So to abuse me before the world.

SHAKESPEARE [*as above — for love is blind, and, it may be, the least bit deaf*]:

I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound.

MARY [*to herself; sick at heart*]: Unkind, and I believed in your love.

SHAKESPEARE [*as above, unconscious of the pain he is causing*]:

I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.

MARY [*unable longer to control her rage, and disappointment*]: Call you such slander

praise? Fie! For shame so to mock your lady here in the presence of your friends.

CHETTLE: What's this? [*Mary has been nursing her wrath unobserved, all eyes being centred on Shakespeare.*]

SEVERAL [*together*]: Silence. Peace. Let Will Shakespeare —

SHAKESPEARE [*apparently unaffected by the interruption*]:

> And yet, by Heaven, I think my love as rare
> As any she belied with false compare.

MARY: Out upon you! A late atonement for such abuse.

SHAKESPEARE: On my honour, no abuse, and no atonement. My sonnet stands as it is written. 'Tis simple truth. 'My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun.'

MARY [*scornfully*]: Will your lady think as you do?

SHAKESPEARE: Perhaps; perhaps she will be angry as you are angry; perhaps she will understand.

MARY: Were they not all cowards here some champion of your mistress would spring forward to defend her good name.

SHAKESPEARE: Her good name has not been questioned.

HERBERT [*to* MARY]: And why should she

need another champion? You are valiant enough in all conscience, sir.

MARY: I will not hear the sex from which my mother stems —

SHAKESPEARE [*interrupting*]: Is not every word I have said true?

MARY: True or false, you shall defend them.

[*She darts from her place behind the table, drawing her sword and making at* SHAKESPEARE *who stands his ground.* HERBERT *interposes himself between them.*]

MARY [*to* HERBERT]: Out of my way. I will slit his throat for him, libellous poetaster.

HERBERT [*seizing her in his arms*]: Who is abusive now?

MARY [*to* SHAKESPEARE, *stamping her foot in vexation*]: I hate you!

SHAKESPEARE [*affecting surprise*]: And why pray?

MARY [*almost in tears, helpless in* HERBERT'S *arms, removes her hat and hurls it in* SHAKESPEARE'S *face*]: I hate you. [*Her heavy raven-black hair comes loose and falls in a huge, glistening, moulten mass about her shoulders.*]

SHAKESPEARE [*in amazement, falling back against* CHETTLE'S *table*]: Mary! Mary!

HERBERT: By Heavens! A woman. [*He holds her even closer.*]

MARY [*to* SHAKESPEARE]: You think you know me well enough to body forth in verses, yet fail to recognise me though we sit above two hours together in the same room. You love to hear your mistress speak? Well, you shall hear her now.

CHETTLE [*a good judge of wine*]: A fiery minx, by all that's holy.

FLETCHER [*disgusted with the whole sex*]: A woman, so to disguise herself and spy upon a man.

HERBERT [*as though to himself*]: Mistress Fitton.

MARY [*bursting into tears, and stamping her foot in baffled rage*]: I hate you! I hate you!

HERBERT: Mary! Mary! Fie, for shame. [*He puts his arm more gently about her; sobbing, she hides her face upon his shoulder.*]

JONSON [*married, and, as he himself tells us, to a shrew*]: Sic transit gloria amoris, my friends.

FLETCHER [*very young and knowing*]: Talk not to me of mistresses!

SHAKESPEARE [*to* CHETTLE]: O'my honour, Hal, I meant no abuse.

CHETTLE: Abuse, sayest thou? 'Twas a sonnet as lightly caressing as the chill of December.

MARY [*to* HERBERT]: Take me away. Please, please, take my away.

HERBERT [*courteously*]: Where you will. [*He leads her towards the door.*]

CHETTLE [*gruffly; anxious to clear the room;* SHAKESPEARE *must be alone with his grief*]: 'Tis late, lads.

RALEIGH: I must to court.

[*He follows* MARY *and* HERBERT *out onto the street. The company breaks up. As the door closes behind the last of them, leaving* CHETTLE *and* SHAKESPEARE *alone in the taproom,* FRANCIS *enters with a cup of ale; seeing the place almost deserted, he drinks it off himself.*]

SHAKESPEARE [*to* CHETTLE, *wearily*]: I wooed the crowds with my lyrics and they gave me leave to strut an hour upon the boards; I wooed a woman and she leaves me for another.

CHETTLE [*fat and optimistic*]: Perchance the labours of thy love are not in vain; all things are born in travail, man or beast, and it may be that you will yet give forth some poem to immortalise this same Mistress Fitton. Men shall see her shadow cross the stage and wonder what she was, or fair or false. Born of a dream, they'll say, who was this Rosalind the

poet wooed with verses hung all about the libraries of the world?

SHAKESPEARE: Hal, you speak truth. And yet I would that I could leave this sorry town; hie me away to Arden, and lie, a fool in the forest, to bask me in the sun. Oh! I could rail on Lady Fortune, sans intermission, an hour by the dial.

CHETTLE: A fig for your raillery! I would I were a priest that I might quench my thirst and impose penance on such young wenches as rob a poet of his wits.

SHAKESPEARE: And so you recall me to mine? [*To the drawer*] Francis, two pints of Bastard. [*Turning again to* CHETTLE.] And, Hal, thou shalt be a priest. I will construct a comedy and in it thou shalt play the part of a fat friar, grown so far in liking with thy folly that thou knowest not how wise in truth thou art; for thou art wise and witty, the butt of many a jest, the occasion of many a quip, but human, Hal—[*breaking off*] May thy sins be upon the heads of thy traducers! Mayest thou live long and merrily, and be rewarded in this world for the good cheer thou hast brought to one, the least of thy admirers.

CHETTLE: Not the least, Will, the least understood.

SHAKESPEARE: So be it. A song, Hal, a song.

The curtain descends as CHETTLE *strikes up:*

"When good King Arthur ruled this land."

L'ENVOI

How shall I praise my love when every phrase
cries out;
'Lo! I am barren, friend, squeezed dry by
hands that flout
Your efforts from the grave?'
Never in words that wave like banners in the
sky
Shall I proclaim my love to every passerby,
To prince and priest and knave:
Here, here dwells Beauty's self! — And yet I
know that she
Plays truant from the dreams that haunted Ar-
cady.

Because old Homer sang, because his lids grew
wet
With musing on her face, Greece boasts of
Helen yet;
And Cleopatra's smile,
Bathed in the tears of kings, the tears of half of
Rome
Mourning great Antony, lies mirrored in the
foam
Of her old father Nile.

Why should my muse be mute? no words rush
out to swear
Allegiance to my love? Is she not all as fair

As those young Villon sang? as Blanche the lily-
white?
Joan of Rouen Town? Dian the kings' delight?
I look upon her face,
And tongue-tied turn away; I read in every line
How the master hand of God refineth things so
fine;
Hers seems the perfect grace,
And yet I know that He each day leans from
above
To trace new glories there.— How can I praise
my love?

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